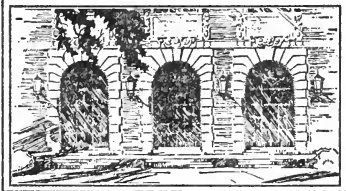


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A V I L L I O N
A N D O T H E R T A L E S .

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"OLIVE," "THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY," "AGATHA'S HUSBAND,"
&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

L O N D O N :
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THE DAUGHTER OF HEREMON.

A Tale of the Vale of Avoca.

“My words leapt forth—‘Heaven heads the count of crimes
With that wild oath.’ She rendered answer high,—
‘Not so—nor once alone—a thousand times
I would be born and die!’”

TENNYSON.

READER, wilt thou go with us far back into the past?
—so far, that looking into the misty horizon which
girds our modern world, earthly realities and the cloud-
land of mythical fable, there converge and mingle?
Let us pass, then, into this shadowy region, whence the
poet draws his symbols, and in airy images shows to
living and breathing humanity the likeness of itself.

* * * * *

In the olden times—before even the footsteps of the
Celt or the Gaul were upon the western mountains—
when there was not a trace of those land-marks of his-
tory which in after days were to be the glory of Irish
antiquaries—there came a little colony of Phœnicians
to the beautiful shore beyond which now rise the Wick-

low hills. Then the nameless island lay in its untrodden loveliness on the bosom of that unknown sea which the adventurers had dared to cross. Strange birds sang to them in the woods, lovely and harmless beasts came and looked at them as they passed, but no human face did the wanderers behold. The virgin earth budded and blossomed, year by year—her luxuriance ungathered, her beauty unbeheld.

The little colony nestled itself in the mountains;—there it grew, and brought to this far-off home the arts and refinements of the East. The plenteous land produced all that the strangers sought; they pierced its depths for mineral riches, and fabricated ornaments of silver and gold: its fruitful surface yielded every appliance of luxury; they went clad in Tyrian purple, and made their dwellings as fair as the house which their forefather Hiram builded for Solomon.

And over all these glories the tide of ages has rolled, sweeping them into nothingness. They were themselves but nothingness—so we will pass them by. The deep heart of humanity, which throbs the same in all generations, and through all variations of time and place, is after all the only truth—the only reality. Let us look on that:—

A little child lived among the mountains. She was the only one of her father — gentle, fair, beloved. Reader! in the daughter of Heremon you may trace, shining through the shadowy mists of the past, the same type of childhood which, ever renewed from age to age, is eternal in its loveliness and purity. Your

own little one, at your feet, looks up to you with the same mystery of love and beauty in her eyes which shone in those of the young Helys. She it was who drove away from the heart of her Phœnician sire whatever there was in it of evil, until he valued all the gold of his rich mines less than a single hair on this child's beloved head.

Helys lived among the mountains secure and happy. She, and the land where she trod, exulted alike in the fearless beauty of youth. The purple and fine linen of Tyre — enervating luxuries of that distant clime from whence her father came—had never oppressed the daughter of Heremon. Born in the new land, she united the strength of the North with the rich beauty of the South. Light and active as was her childish frame, it had at times the languid grace which marked her descent from climes whereon the sun casts nearer and more burning rays; and Phœnician Dido herself never turned towards the beloved Eneas eyes whose dark, glorious depths revealed more of the slumbering soul beneath, than was shadowed forth in the intense gaze of the child Helys. Such eyes—whether we meet them in our daily walks about this common world, or dream of them as they were centuries ago, when the world, we deem, was younger and fairer than now—such eyes always possess or foretell a strange history. Let it become defined—a simple story of a woman's life, beheld at the several epochs which make a day the symbolization of an existence—Dawn, Morning, Noon, and Night. And first cometh—

D A W N .

THE child stood on a mountain-side, looking up towards its top with an awed yet half longing gaze, even as in our youth we look towards life, wondering, as we climb on, how far distant is that cloud-hung summit, and through what strange paths will our journey thither lead. Helys cast her childish glances forward, but they could not pierce beyond the verdure-covered crag at the base of which she stood. It rose above her head, just lofty enough to shut out the further view, and to keep those young feet safe within the little paradise of flowers and green bushes that lay below. Yet still the child could not but look beyond, as if the future even then wore in her sight a mysterious beauty and charm.

Look up, sweet Helys, with that lovely serene face, the lifted eyes, the parted lips ; look up ! for even now, though thou knowest it not, the shadow of that dim future is falling upon thee.

On the top of the crag, gleaming from between the branches of a low tree, the child saw a face ! Human it seemed, and beautiful ; but its beauty was unlike any the little Phœnician maiden had ever beheld. It startled her ; and, half in surprise, half in delight, she uttered a cry. The next moment there fell from the tree, down almost at her feet, a young boy.

He lay without speech or movement ; his cheek was bloodless, and in its fairness looked so deadly white, that Helys began to tremble lest it should be no human

being she beheld, but one of those spirits which she heard drew their existence from airy mists and mountain snows. Still there was a human likeness in the slender form; and the young limbs, which the rude garment of skins left bare, were fearfully wasted and torn with briars. It could not be a spirit; for spirits could not suffer thus! The child's fear vanished, and a tender compassion arose instead, filling her eyes with tears.

She crept nearer to the boy; and at last, stooping over him, ventured to lay her tiny finger on the rings of pale gold hair that fell round his face in matted confusion. She touched the closed eye-lids, and put her cheek to the mouth, from which the breath could scarcely be perceived to issue; she lifted the hand, but it sank down again on the grass; then the little maiden once more grew terrified, and began to weep.

“Wake, beautiful stranger—wake!—and I will take thee home, and make thee my brother! I will give thee honey and milk, and love thee! Dost thou hear? Wake, then!”

And, when there was no answer, the child knelt down, laid her young mouth close to the lips, and tried to breathe her soul into his with kisses.

They roused the boy to life—ay, to a deeper life than that which then revived and lighted up his eyes with an almost adoring wonder as he beheld the face of Helys. From that hour, within the half-savage mountain youth awoke the yet slumbering soul.

Month after month the stranger-boy dwelt in the

house of Heremon. He learned the Phœnician tongue, and then told them of the country far inland, from whence he had wandered, where men lived like wild beasts, and whence he, an orphan, had been driven to dwell in the woods, or starve and die. And still, through all the rudeness of his mien, there shone out in him, day by day, a great and noble spirit, such as from time to time is born in the lowliest of earth's dwellings, to make of the man in whom it abides, a ruler among his fellows, and a helper on of the world's great work.

Therefore it was not strange, if, when for a space this stranger-youth had grown wise in all the learning of the Phœnicians, he should yearn to go out into the wide world, and leave the spot which already confined his aspiring soul. Sometimes when he talked of this, Heremon looked grave, and bade him rest, and delve among the gold mines; for the old Phœnician loved the boy, and had given him, in addition to his savage name, that of his own dead brother Ith, so that the young Ith-Einar was counted as the adopted son of the rich Heremon. And many a time did the child Helys, as she wreathed her arms round his neck, entreating him not to go away, think—ay, and say aloud, in the simplicity of her heart—that never was brother so good, so noble, so beloved as he.

But when at last a Phœnician vessel touched the shore, and brought to the colonists strange tales of the world beyond the seas, Ith-Einar could resist no more. The ship bore back with it to Tyre and Sidon the young adventurer from this new land. Helys, still a

child, wept at first a child's passionate tears; but as she watched the white speck fade on the mysterious expanse of waters, these tears stilled themselves into feelings deeper and more silent. The golden mists had furled away from the young child's life—it was no longer dawn.

MORNING.

PILGRIM of nature, to whom the universe is full of symbols, hast thou seen the gray dawn creep over the hills, cloudy at first, so that long after the hour when the whole creation is full of renewed life, dew still lies on the grass, a pale shadow rests in the depths of the valleys, and the morning-sky, covered with a silvery shroud, bends heavily down over the yet half-awakened earth? Until suddenly the clouds part, and bursting through them, filling the world with a flood of light, appears at last the all-glorious sun? Then the whole earth breaks forth into singing, for the shadows are past, and the perfect day is come.

So it was with the daughter of Heremon. She grew up in her mountain solitudes, passing from childhood to maiden beauty, and still over her spirit hung a dim veil, beneath whose mysterious shadow the young virgin lived, even as the half-slumbering earth beneath the clouds of dawn. But when the time came, the veil was lifted, the clouds swept asunder, and the sun of her life arose.

Ith-Einar came back from over the seas, and stood

before her whom he had left a child. He stood sublime in his youthful beauty—not only the outward beauty which dazzles the eye, but that which subdues the soul. He came from the East—his mind rich in all the treasures of those glorious lands—the wisdom of Egypt, the luxurious grace of Tyre, the poetry of Greece. And more than all, there shone forth in his every tone and gesture the remembered tenderness of the old childish days. Helys knew that he had brought back from those gorgeous climes the pure heart of the mountain-boy.

So these two loved one another. What more can tongue utter or pen describe of earthly joy?—the fullness of youth, of hope, of blessedness, the life of life that is in those words, “*they loved one another!*”

After a time there came a cloud over their glad morning. While the young lovers walked the world, seeing all around them, the earth below and the sky above, the past and the future, but in the light of this exquisite dream, the old Phœnician bent over his gold mines, until his nature grew base and sordid. Ith-Einar, with his pure and continually-aspiring soul, seemed to Heremon like a reproving voice from the days of his own youth. He stood beside the miser, an image of that holier life from which he himself had turned away, and the dark, foul heart shrank from the glory of his presence.

“Thou art poor,” Heremon would say to the youth, “and poverty is an evil thing. Cast aside thy wild dreams, and go and seek out a gold mine—then come back, and I will call thee my son.”

And then Ith-Einar would in vain repress his proud answer, while he turned and gazed on the face of his beloved in vague fear, lest he should read there one shadow betokening the low, mean soul that dwelt in her sire.

Love in a woman engrosses all things, bears all things, atones for all things, but it is not so with man. Else why was it, that before many months had passed, Helys stood alone on the mountains? Ith-Einar was far away over the seas. He had come and gone like a dream, but when that dream was ended, its glory remained. Little of sorrow mingled with it, for she was so young, she had so much to hope. She knew he would come again, and so, after the parting tears were dried, she exulted in the new life which he had kindled in her soul. She walked the mountain-paths he had trod, she learned unconsciously to speak his words, to think his thoughts, to love what he loved, to raise her yet unformed and girlish nature to all that was good and beautiful in his, that she might be like him and worthy of him, not only in outward things, but in the purest depths of her heart.

Thus the years crept by; but a year is so little when life is still in its morning. The flowers had time to gain a deeper perfume, the sky to grow bluer and purer—that was all. Helys went on her way, smiling still, and trusting evermore.

Heremon died, and the young Phœnician youths began to see how rich were the gold mines and how fair was the face of Helys. But she bent her proud

head with a serene look, and turned away—smiling to herself that any one should dream a dream so wild, as to think to win one glance from the betrothed of Ith-Einar.

And still moon after moon rose from out the sea, and set behind the mountains, but Ith-Einar came not. Night called unto day with a great voice of longing and of mourning—still he came not. Helys had made her home in a fair and lonely vale, around which the beloved hills rose—the hills whereon she had walked with him. Through the green depths crept two lovely streams—so little asunder, that one could hear the other murmuring incessantly. They seemed to answer one another like two lovers whom some strange fate has parted, and who lift continually their sorrowful voices, yet cannot pass the narrow bound which eternally divides them.

Helys sat often between the beautiful streams, thinking of them in this wise, and hearing in their mournful yet subdued lament the echo of her own. Patient she was amidst her loneliness, until the spring came out upon the hills, and sent up from the valleys a tender voice. Then Helys wept more and more, and there rang for ever in her heart these words from a strange Book which Ith-Einar had heard read in the East, and of which he often spake:—

“The winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. Arise, my love, and come away O let

me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is lovely."

But the streams alone answered her with their perpetual moan.

In the May twilight, when the young moon floated pale amidst the sunset glories, Helys stood and wept. "O moon, that comest from the East, tell me if thou hast looked on the face of my beloved. Ith-Einar! Ith-Einar! are there no powers in earth or heaven that can bring me tidings of thee?"

While Helys called aloud, there crept a deeper shadow over the valley; the streams seemed to cease their plainings, and to run without sound. And out of the mist there came a voice:—

"Child of the earth, thy great Mother heareth. Speak on."

The despair of love knows no fear. Helys trembled not, but answered, "O thou, if thou be the spirit of the earth, of which I have heard, how canst thou fathom the depth of my sorrow? What should thy cold breast know of love, and of love's sufferings? Is there aught in the dull realm of inanimate nature which can respond to the agony of a human soul?"

The voice replied, "Vain doubter! the whole universe is filled with the spirit of love. It runs through my deep bosom like a living tide, making the flowers spring up, and the trees bear fruit, and the face of the wide world become fair. Why is it that, when my children look on these things, they feel their hearts glow within them, and they long to love and be

loved? Because my power is upon them, and the spirit within me answers to theirs. All nature has but one soul, which is universal love."

Helys listened, yet the words seemed strange; she understood them not. Her woman's heart had but one voice, and that cried ever in its mournful intensity, "The world is nought to me—I live alone in Ith-Einar."

And she answered to the spirit, "Mine eyes are dim with weeping, for my betrothed is afar. There lies between us a gulf that I cannot pass; I shall go mourning alone all my life long, even as this stream at my foot, which calls unto its beloved across the valley,—but they will never, never meet. It is the shadowing of my fate."

"It is so," answered the solemn voice. "As surely as that these rivers shall one day meet and mingle their waters, so surely shalt thou and thy beloved become one—heart to heart, soul to soul. When the time cometh, remember!"

The maiden fell to the earth in a deep swoon of joy. When she awoke, it was day. Sunshine filled the vale, and danced upon the two streams. Already each had somewhat altered its channel, and creeping along over the velvet sward, drew nearer to its fellow. And as day by day they both grew, and what was once green grass and flowers became murmuring waters, Helys watched the marvel. Strength and hope came into her heart, and she believed.

NOON.

YET a little while, and there is a footstep on the hills, and the streams rush on with a louder and more joyful melody, for Ith-Einar has returned to Helys. Once again they stand together on the mountains, in the full noon of their life and love. As the sun looks on the earth, which his influence has ripened into perfect loveliness, Ith-Einar looked on Helys. And as that fair earth gazes upward to her bridegroom sun, who has called forth into being her powers and beauties, and before whom she casts them all in joyful humility, so the eyes of Helys were lifted to the face of Ith-Einar.

Ere long she saw that over this beloved face there had come a change. A grave thoughtfulness sat ever in his eyes. The very smile of the beautiful lips was sad; and through them words of love came seldom, or with a solemn tenderness that moved her almost to tears. When she asked why it was thus with him, Ith-Einar answered that he had travelled far and suffered much—that the world hardly seemed the same as in the days of their first youth.

“What is the world to us in our beautiful valley?” the maiden would say. “There we will rest—thou and I; and I will comfort thee, and thou shalt suffer no more.” But Ith-Einar smiled mournfully, and answered her not a word. When the sun went down, and the valley grew solemn in the twilight shadows, he took his betrothed by the hand and said—

“Beloved, listen to what is in my heart. That heart was once laid bare to thee, with all its dreams, all its aspirations. It was young then, *now* it is old, or seems so. Helys, that which I once held most precious, is not sufficient for me now; I have learned that there is a deeper and a higher life than that of love.”

The girl trembled, and her eyes sought his, but they were lifted towards the stars. “It must be so, since thou sayest it,” she answered meekly.

He went on, “I thirsted for knowledge—for happiness—most of all for truth. I sought from land to land some deep well of wisdom and purity, whereof my soul might drink and be satisfied, but found only broken cisterns. Then I began to hate the world, and all it contained. It mocked me, I gave it back scorn for scorn. I think now, when I look in thine eyes, my Helys,”—and his tone softened, “that perhaps it might not have been thus with me, had I stayed in these mountains, where the dew of thy pure spirit could ever have fallen upon me. But that is over now.

“I came to a land renowned in the East for its wisdom, and pomp, and power. I had stood among the people of Egypt and of Greece, while they adored many gods—some beautiful, some foul—and laughed secretly at their idle dreams. Now I beheld a temple where was worshipped One whom none saw, but whose presence filled all things. I asked more concerning this great undefined Spirit, which seemed to resemble a power which I had imagined, and in whose existence I longed to believe.

“ They answered me, that I was not one of the holy people,—that I could not pass beyond the outer court. But the more my desire was withheld, the stronger it grew. I became a proselyte. I heard words sublime and wise as I had never heard before. They told me that in such a voice had this mighty One spoken unto man. Then my soul grew dumb before His holiness and His glory, and I worshipped the God of the Hebrews.”

Helys gazed on her lover in wonder and awe, for his countenance shone with almost superhuman brightness. “ Thou shalt teach me more of this Divine One,” she whispered; “ I will bow my knees with thee before thy God.”

Ith-Einar pressed her hand, but did not turn towards her, and soon the light faded from his face: when he again spoke, his voice had sunk from its deep, sublime tones to a tremulous murmur.

“ Helys, the beloved of my youth, thou must listen to me yet longer. When after its struggles and wanderings my soul had found the one great truth, it rejoiced with exceeding gladness. Then I vowed a solemn vow, that I would show forth the light that was within me—that I would carry unto the far west this faith, and so atone for the pride and hate and scorn which had been in my evil heart towards my brethren.”

“ Let it be so, then,” said Helys, and a glad light was in her saint-like eyes. “ A little sad it will be, to leave this fair vale, but thy wisdom is best. We will

go forth, my beloved, into the wide world, and enter together upon this noble work of thine."

Ith-Einar covered his face in his robe, and when he lifted it, it was pale, stern, and passionless. "The God of the Hebrews receives not blemished offerings. I vowed to Him wealth and life, body and soul. No human tie may stand between me and the great cause for which I live. Helys, I must go forth *alone!*"

O ye stars, look down solemn and calm on that wild thrill of woman's agony, too deep for words, for groans, for tears—silent as death itself, for it was likest death. Helys had knelt beside him when she last spoke; she knelt still.

Ith-Einar stood there too, without a word. He dared not look in her face, but he laid his hand upon her head in a blessing, solemn and mournful.

"We will talk no more now, Helys; I must quit thee awhile, for it is the hour of prayer." And he passed slowly up the valley, leaving her kneeling still.

A moment more, and through that dull trance broke the pleasant murmur of the two streams. Then Helys threw herself on the grass and wept aloud. None ever knew the terrible despair that poured itself out, and then grew sublimed into strength and calmness beneath the eternal stars.

When the Hebrew proselyte had finished his prayer, his betrothed stood beside him.

"Ith-Einar," she said, in a low sweet voice, "my beloved, thou shalt keep thy vow: I am content."

He turned, and his heart failed him a little. "I dare not repent me, and yet it is bitter. I never thought of thee, O my childhood's love! Would that I had died!"

"Not so," answered Helys. "Heart of my heart! would I stand between thee and thy glory? Would my weak clinging arms keep thee from the noble and holy path? Never! It may be that even my love is less pure than thine—but thou didst love me, Ith-Einar?"

"Thee ever, and only thee!" murmured the young proselyte.

"Then what have I to mourn? My love saw only thee, and myself in thee—thine embraces the whole world with its wide arms. If it had been that thou hadst left me for any other human love, even then I would not have murmured against thee, Ith-Einar," and her voice failed a little; "I would have remembered my own unworthiness, and turned away and died. But now——"

He looked up with trembling eagerness.

"I will live—live to show that the betrothed of Ith-Einar loved his high virtues and his glory better than himself, and so was not unworthy of him. Since his love had made hers so holy, that she could lose him—and endure. No, I shall not die, Ith-Einar: I will live to tread in thy footsteps, and to follow humbly after thee in the great cause. Thou shalt go forth into the wide world; I will stay here; but we will both work the same work to our lives' end."

For a little space longer Ith-Einar abode in the beautiful valley. Helys listened to the wisdom, the divine boldness which flowed from the lips of the young proselyte, and her soul grew stronger evermore. For the ideal of love was still undefiled; the adored image had not fallen from its shrine. What mattered it if lingering human affection poured forth there at times secret oblations of heart's blood and tears?

Once Ith-Einar, thinking of her weak womanhood which might not have power to stand alone, spoke of a time when some Phœnician bridegroom should walk beside her in the vale. But Helys pointed to the sun, which was then high in the heavens, and said, "He rises not twice in one day: with his coming came the light; if clouds hide his face, though dim, it is still day; but when he sets it will be night." Ith-Einar turned away his face, and said no more.

At length he made ready to depart. It was the last day—the last hour. They stood on the hills, and looked down into the valley. Hand in hand they stood, those young martyrs—both self-devoted; one for faith, the other for love! Which was the holier?

"Ith-Einar," said the maiden, not weeping, but in the low solemn tone with which we bid farewell to one whose feet are already turned to the spirit-land. "Ith-Einar, if I should look on thy face no more, thou wilt keep me in thy heart until death?"

"Until death," echoed the proselyte. "And the

God of the Hebrews bless thee and give thee peace, O beloved of my youth !”

He fell on her neck and wept. Then they kissed each other without speaking, and Ith-Einar went his way.

N I G H T.

WHY should we fear thee, O night, mother of shadows? Why should we linger in the sunshine, and dread to pass into thy holy darkness, which, veiling earth, suffers us only to see the face of heaven with its innumerable stars? And why, oh! why, as the day of our life hurries on, should we tremble when its twilight gathers round us, and shrink from the coming of the night which will close all? If as that time draws near, all world-sounds cease, and light after light goes out in darkness, and on the pathway that was once alive with many footsteps we hear our own feeble tread alone—why tremble? Earth’s landscapes are hid, but the starry heaven looks nearer. Earth’s confused noises are hushed, that through the solemn stillness we may hear the voice of God.

With the daughter of Heremon it was eventide. Yet she had done her work; she had lived her life. And that life was not a brief one; for many summers had gone by since Ith-Einar had turned away his face from the valley of the two streams. Was the May-night forgotten, with its strange vision and prophecy? No; but as the silver-haired, pale-browed woman

passed by and heard the loud music of the growing rivers, she smiled with a serene yet pensive smile at the girlish faith which made its desire its belief, and looked for an earthly fulfilment of what eternity alone could give.

Helys had outlived her youth's sorrow—not its love. All our griefs are of the earth, earthy; but the true joys of this world are beyond it—they have immortal roots, and will bear immortal flowers. Therefore it is that a pure heart can endure so much and live—ay, so as to find in life great peace even unto the end. It was thus with Helys, so that among her people and her kindred the name she bore was “The Daughter of Peace.” She went among the poor with a sweet voice of comfort, and a hand never empty; but the voice was low, not loud, and the hand gave unobserved from beneath the robe. She healed the sick, and still oftener the sick in heart—for the soul-physician must himself have suffered before he can cure. And when the youths talked jestingly of her fading beauty, and the matrons, with their train of laughing children, swept by her on her lonely path, Helys drew to her bosom the orphan and the fatherless, and was comforted.

Year by year she retired for a season to the solitude of her valley, to commune with the past, and await the time when the calm evening of her days should darken into still calmer night. And evermore through the green vale she heard resound the voice of waters louder and nearer, and more joyful as they approached their meeting.

Once, at the time of sunset, the daughter of Heremon walked by the side of the rivers. Her thoughts, swayed by that unconscious impulse which seems sometimes the influence of the coming future, turned towards the days of old—not the sorrowful days, but the far past, ere she knew sorrow. She saw through the tree-branches the face of the bright-haired child; she walked with the betrothed of her girlhood upon the sunny hills. The bitter cry of her heart rose up, and would not be restrained.

“Where art thou, O my youth’s love? Hast thou at last forgotten me? In this great wide world have we lost one another never to find again—to die unfound. I call on thee in the depths of my yearning heart,—and there is silence. I forgive thee for all my pain,—and there is silence. Thy great glories reach me, and thy noble deeds, but from thee towards me there is ever silence. O beloved of my youth, when we two die and stand before the All-father—will it break this terrible, terrible silence?”

Thus she moaned and moaned, until the merciful All-father heard.

A sick, weak, dying man, came over the mountains. No one knew him among those who had been as his own people, but he crept in the sunset to the valley of streams, and said, questioningly, “Helys?”

Without one regret, one reproach, she opened to him her faithful arms, as she would have done any day throughout the long wilderness of life, had he only come.

Now, O blessed night ! lay thy peaceful hand on the head of the weary ; for the time of toil is over—life's day is just closing, but its last hours are full of holy joy, because the long-parted are together, to be parted no more.

Now lift up your voices, O streams ! swell your triumphant marriage-hymn ; for the eternal espousals are drawing nigh, when no earthly bar of severance shall come between the bridegroom and the bride.

Again the stars, journeying over that silent valley, looked down upon Ith-Einar and Helys. Those who had been one in heart through life were not divided now. Hand-in-hand, in grave and solemn communion, the two aged ones walked along the shore of the eternal sea, and heard its mighty waves already dashing at their feet—that ocean dirge was to them a hymn of joy. Yet a little did their eyes turn back to the way they had passed through.

“Helys,” said Ith-Einar, “much that before was dim grows clearer to me now. It might be that even the wild zeal for which I gave up all, was not wholly pure. I thought to be a prophet among men—to stand on the wilderness-mount, like the greatest of the Hebrews, and pour out my voice amidst Heaven's thunders : but it was *my* voice still to which I would have had my brethren hearken ; and *my* human glory, as of a man sent from God, seemed to me more precious than the divine message I bore. Therefore *my* work was not perfect.”

“But it has yet been glorious,” answered the low,

woman's voice, whose under-melody, forgotten and lost amidst the tempests of life, was now needed to soothe its ending. He had lived without that music—but without it he could not die.

“What dost thou call *glorious*?” said Ith-Einar bitterly. “I have been a prophet—a leader—a king; but the men who kissed my garment's hem would not have removed one briar from before my aged feet.”

“Still,” whispered her comforting voice, “thou hast done thy work, and a great soul needs no guerdon save the good it leaves behind.”

“Oh, Helys!” was the mournful reply, “the lonely mountain bears on its head nothing but snow; flowers grow in the valleys, and it may be that their perfume is the sweeter to the Great Spirit. I have sometimes thought there was sin even in my vow; and when the incense of my glory rose up to heaven, I remembered that the sweet savour was poured out upon a sacrifice, and one offered not by me alone. My Helys! I dare not look on thy face, and say, how is it now with thee?”

“Peace—all peace!” she answered, and her eyes were lifted upwards, smiling. “I have found peace, because I loved. It is not the heart's anguish, but its change, which makes life bitter and hard to bear. All my sorrow seems now dim as a half-forgotten dream at dawn. Think of it no more, Ith-Einar.”

And then there fell upon both a deep stillness, while darker gathered the moonless shadows, the wind sank

into a calm, and the stars in their courses marked silently each hour and minute of the human pulse that beat evermore slower and slower.

“Helys,” said Ith-Einar faintly, “long ago my soul awoke to life beneath a kiss of thy child’s lips; let the same touch seal its blessed rest.”

She kissed him with the last holy kiss of the dying, and both knew that it was so.

“We need not say farewell to one another again,” murmured Ith-Einar.

“No—never any more,” was the answer. And the words and the smile upon the lips of both were joyful as those of two young espoused ones, who stand for the first time by the light of their own hearth.

Helys lifted up her dim eyes, and saw through the valley’s darkness the glimmer of a white rising flood; she heard amidst the death-stillness the music of the two streams that rushed on nearer and nearer in wild rejoicing. And she knew the time was come. She looked on the face of him who might have been her bridegroom—it was overspread with a gray shadow; but still she watched, until the shadow passed away, and there crept over the dead face a smile, that smoothing from it every furrow which years had made brought back the beautiful likeness of its first youth. Helys drew closer to her beloved, kissed his eyes and mouth, and, laying her head in his bosom, fell softly asleep. It was the sleep of eternal peace.

Then arose a triumphant music—the voice of rising floods that no human power could restrain. Stronger

it grew and louder, filling the valley with its echoes, and resounding even unto the stars, until it sank into one melodious murmur of deepest gladness.

THE WATERS HAD MET.

KONG TOLV.*

A Fairy Tale of Scandinavia.

HYLDREDA KALM stood at the door of her cottage, and looked abroad into the quietness of the Sabbath morn. The village of Skjelskör lay at a little distance down the vale, lighted by the sunshine of a Zealand summer, which, though brief, is glowing and lovely even as that of the south. Hyldreda had looked for seventeen years upon this beautiful scene, the place where she was born. Sunday after Sunday she had stood thus, and listened for the distant tinkle of the church bell. A stranger, passing by, might have said, how lovely were her face and form; but the widowed mother whose sole stay she was, and the little delicate sister who had been her darling from the cradle, would have answered, that if none were so fair, none were likewise so good as Hyldreda; and that all the village knew. If she did love to bestow greater taste and care on her Sunday garments than most young damsels of her class, she had a right—for was she not beautiful as

* The idea of this story is partly taken from a Danish *Visa*, or legendary ballad, entitled “Proud Margaret.”

any lady? And did not the eyes of Esbern Lynge say so, when, week after week, he came up the hilly road, and descended again to the little chapel, supporting the feeble mother's slow steps, and watching his betrothed as she bounded on before with little Resa in her hand?

"Is Esbern coming?" said the mother's voice within.

"I know not—I did not look," answered Hyldreda, with a girlish wilfulness. "I saw only the sun shining on the river, and the oak-wood waving in the breeze."

"Look down the road, child; the time passes. Go quickly."

"She is gone already," said Resa, laughing merrily. "She is standing under the great elder-tree to wait for Esbern Lynge."

"Call her back, call her back!" cried the mother anxiously. "To stand beneath an elder-tree, and this night will be St. John's Eve! On Sunday, too, and she a Sunday-child! Call her quickly, Resa."

The little child lifted up her voice, "Hyld—"

"Not her name—utter not her name!" And the widow Kalm went on muttering to herself, "Perhaps the Hyldemoer* will not have heard. Alas, the day! when my child was born under an elder-tree, and I, poor desolate mother! was terrified into giving my babe that name. Great Hyldemoer, be propitiated! Holy

* *Hyldemoer*, elder-mother, is the name of a Danish elf inhabiting the elder-tree. *Eda* signifies a grandmother or female ancestor. Children born on Sundays were especially under the power of the elves.

Virgin, hear!" And the widow's prayer became a curious mingling of superstition and piety. "Blessed Mary! let not the elves have power over my child! Have I not kept her from all evil?—does not the holy cross lie on her pure breast day and night? Do I not lead her every Sunday, winter and summer, in storm, sunshine, or snow, to the chapel in the valley? And this day I will say for her a double prayer."

The mother's counted beads had scarce come to an end when Hyldreda stood by her side, and, following the light-footed damsel, came Esbern Lynge.

"Child, why didst thou linger under the tree?" said the widow. "It does not become a young maiden to stand flaunting outside her door. Who wert thou watching so eagerly?"

"Not thee, Esbern," laughed the girl, shaking her head at her betrothed, who interposed with a happy, conscious face; "I was looking at a grand train that wound along the road, and thinking how pleasant it would be to dress on a Sunday like the lady of the castle, and recline idly behind four prancing horses instead of trudging on in these clumsy shoes."

The mother frowned, and Esbern Lynge looked sorrowful.

"I wish I could give her all she longs for," sighed the young man, as they proceeded on their way, his duteous arm supporting the widow, while Hyldreda and Resa went bounding onward before them; "she is as beautiful as a queen—I would that I could make her one."

“Wish rather, Esbern, that Heaven may make her a pious, lowly-hearted maid, and, in good time, a wife; that she may live in humility and content, and die in peace among her own people.”

Esbern said nothing—he could not think of death and *her* together. So he and the widow Kalm walked on silently, and so slowly that they soon lost sight of the two blithe sisters.

Hyldreda was talking merrily of the grand sight she had just seen, and describing to little Resa the gilded coach, the prancing horses, with glittering harness. “Oh, but it was a goodly train, as it swept down towards the river! Who knows?—perhaps it may have been the king and queen themselves.”

“No,” said little Resa, rather fearfully, “you know Kong Tolv * never lets any mortal king pass the bridge of Skjelskör.”

“*Kong Tolv!* What, more stories about Kong Tolv!” laughed the merry maiden. “I never saw him; I wish I could see him, for then I might believe in thy tales, little one.”

“Hush, hush! But mother told me never to speak of these things to thee,” answered Resa; “unsay the wish, or some harm may come.”

“I care not! who would heed these elfin tales on such a lovely day? Look, Resa, down that sunny meadow, where there is a cloud-shadow dancing on the

* Kong Tolv, or *King Twelve*, is one of the Elle-kings who divide the fairy sovereignty of Zealand.

grass; a strange cloud it is too, for it almost resembles a human form."

"It must be Kong Tolv rolling himself in the sunshine," cried the trembling child; "look away, my sister, lest he should hear us."

Again Hyldreda's fearless laugh made music through the still air, and she kept looking back until they passed from the open road into the gloom of the oak wood.

"It is strange that thou shouldst be so brave," said Resa once more. "I tremble at the very thought of the Elle-people of whom our villagers tell, while thou hast not a single fear. Why is it, sister?"

"I know not, save that I never yet feared anything," answered Hyldreda, carelessly. "As for Kong Tolv, let him come; I care not."

While she spoke, a breeze swept through the oak-wood, the trees began to bend their tops, and the under branches were stirred with leafy murmurings, as the young girl passed beneath. She lifted her fair face to meet them. "Ah! 'tis delicious, this soft scented wind; it touches my face like airy kisses: it makes the leaves seem to talk to me in musical whispers. Dost thou not hear them too, little Resa? and dost thou not——"

Hyldreda suddenly stopped, and gazed eagerly down the road.

"Well, sister," said Resa, "what art dreaming of now? Come, we shall be late at church, and mother will scold." But the elder sister stood motionless.

“How strange is thy look! What dost thou see, Hyldreda?”

“See—what is there!”

“Nothing, but a cloud of dust that the wind sweeps forward. Stand back, sister, or it will blind thee.”

Still Hyldreda bent forward with admiring eyes, muttering, “Oh! the grand golden chariot, with its four beautiful white horses! And therein sits a man—surely it is the king! and the lady beside him is the queen. See, she turns——”

Hyldreda paused, dumb with wonder; for, despite the gorgeous show of jewelled attire, she recognised that face. It was the same she had looked at an hour before in the little cracked mirror. The lady in the carriage was the exact counterpart of herself!

The pageant came and vanished. Little Resa turned round and wiped her eyes—she, innocent child, had seen nothing but a cloud of dust. Her elder sister answered not her questionings, but remained silent, oppressed by a nameless awe. It passed not, even when the chapel was reached, and Hyldreda knelt to pray. Above the sound of the hymn she heard the ravishing music of the leaves in the oak wood, and instead of the priest she seemed to behold the two dazzling forms which had sat side-by-side in the golden chariot.

When service was ended, and all went homewards, she lingered under the trees where the vision, or reality, whichever it was, had met her sight, half-longing for its re-appearance. But her mother whis-

pered something to Esbern, and they hurried Hyldreda away.

She laid aside her Sunday mantle, the scarlet woof which to spin, weave, and fashion, had cost her a world of pains. How coarse and ugly it seemed! She threw it contemptuously aside, and thought how beautiful looked the purple-robed lady, who was so like herself.

“And why should I not be as fair as she? I should, if I were only dressed as fine. Heaven might as well have made me a lady, instead of a poor peasant girl.”

These repinings entered the young heart hitherto so pure and happy. They haunted her even when she rejoined her mother, Resa, and Esbern Lynge. She prepared the noonday meal, but her step was heavy and her hand unwilling. The fare seemed coarse, the cottage looked dark and poor. She wondered what sort of a palace-home was that owned by the beautiful lady; and whether the king, if king the stranger were, presided at his banquet table as awkwardly as did Esbern Lynge at the mean board here.

At the twilight, Hyldreda did not steal out as usual to talk with her lover beneath the rose-porch. She went and hid herself out of his sight, under the branches of the great elder-tree, which to her had always a strange charm, perhaps because it was the spot of all others where she was forbidden to stay. However, this day Hyldreda began to feel herself no longer a child, but a woman whose will was free.

She sat under the dreamy darkness of the heavy

foliage. Its faint, sickly odour overpowered her like a spell. Even the white bunches of elder flowers seemed to grow alive in the twilight, and to change into faces, grinning at her whithersoever she turned. She shut her eyes, and tried to summon back the vision of the golden chariot, and especially of the king-like man who sat inside. Scarcely had she seen him clearly, but she felt he looked a king. If wishing could bring to her so glorious a fortune, she would almost like to have, in addition to the splendours of rich dress and grand palaces, such a noble-looking man for her lord and husband.

And the poor maiden was rudely wakened from her dream, by feeling on her delicate shoulders the two heavy hands of Esbern Lynge.

Haughtily she shook them off. Alas! he, loving her so much, had ever been lightly loved in return! to-day he was not loved at all. He came at an ill time, for the moment his hand put aside the elder-branches, all the dazzling fancies of his betrothed vanished in air. He came, too, with an ill wooing, for he implored her to trifle with him no more, but to fulfil her mother's hope and his, and enter as mistress at the blacksmith's forge. She, who had just been dreaming of a palace home! Not a word she answered at first, and then cold, cruel words, worse than silence. So Esbern, who, though a lover, was a high-spirited youth, and thought it shame to be mocked by a girl's light tongue, left her there and went away, not angry, but very sorrowful.

Little Resa came to summon her sister. But Hyldreda trembled before the gathering storm, for Widow Kalm, though a tender mother, was one who well knew how to rule. Her loud, severe voice already warned the girl of the reproof that was coming. To avoid it for a little, until her own proud spirit was calmed, Hyldreda told Resa she would not come in until after she had taken a little walk down the moonlight road. As she passed from under the elder-tree, she heard a voice, like her mother's, and yet not her mother's—no, it could never be, for it shouted after her—

“Come now, or come no more!”

Some evil impulse goaded the haughty girl to assert her womanly right of free action, and she passed from her home, flying with swift steps. A little, only a little absence, to show her indignant pride, and she would be back again, to heal all strife. Nevertheless, ere she was aware, Hyldreda had reached the oak-wood, beneath which she had seen the morning's bewildering sight.

And there again, brighter in the moonlight than it had ever seemed in the day, came sweeping by the stately pageant. Its torches flung red shadows on the trees, its wheels resounded through the night's quiet with a music as of silver bells. And sitting in his state alone, grand but smiling, was the lord of all this splendour.

The chariot stopped, and he dismounted. Then the whole train vanished, and, shorn of all his glories,

except a certain brightness which his very presence seemed to shed, the king, if he were indeed such, stood beside the trembling peasant maid.

He did not address her, but looked in her face inquiringly, until Hyldreda felt herself forced to be the first to speak.

“My lord, who art thou, and what is thy will with me?”

He smiled. “Thanks, gentle maiden, for thy question has taken off the spell. Otherwise it could not be broken, even by Kong Tolv.”

Hyldreda shuddered with fear. Her fingers tried to seize the cross which always lay on her breast, but no! she had thrown aside the coarse black wooden crucifix, while dreaming of ornaments of gold. And it was St. John’s Eve, and she stood beneath the haunted oak-wood. No power had she to fly, and her prayers died on her lips, for she knew herself to be in the Hill-king’s power.

Kong Tolv began to woo, after the elfin fashion, brief and bold. “Fair maiden, the Dronningstolen* is empty, and ’tis thou must fill it. Come and enter my palace under the hill.”

But the maiden sobbed out that she was too lowly to sit on a queen’s chair, and that none of mortals, save the dead, made their home underground. And she prayed the Elle-king to let her go back to her mother and little Resa.

He only laughed. “Wouldst be content, then, with

* Dronningstolen, or Queen’s Chair.

the poor cottage, and the black bread, and the labour from morn till eve? Didst thou not of thyself wish for a palace and a lord like me? And did not the Hyldemoer waft me the wish, so that I came to meet and welcome thee under the hill?"

Hyldreda made one despairing effort to escape, but she heard again Kong Tolv's proud laugh, and looking up, she saw that the thick oak-wood had changed to an army. In place of each tree stood a fierce warrior, ready to guard every step. She thought it must be all a delirious dream that would vanish with the morning. Suddenly she heard the far village clock strike the hour. Mechanically she counted—one—two—three—four—up to *twelve*.

As she pronounced the last word, Kong Tolv caught her in his arms, saying, "Thou hast named me and art mine."

Instantly all the scene vanished, and Hyldreda found herself standing on the bleak side of a little hill, alone in the moonlight. But very soon the clear night darkened, and a heavy storm arose. Trembling she looked around for shelter, and saw in the hill-side a tiny door, which seemed to invite her to enter. She did so! In a moment she stood dazzled by a blaze of light—a mortal amidst the festival of the elves. She heard the voice of Kong Tolv, half-speaking, half-singing:—

"Welcome, maiden, fair and free,
Thou hast come of thyself in the hill to me;
Stay thou here, nor thy fate deplore;
Thou hast come of thyself in at my door."

And bewildered by the music, the dance, and the splendour, Hyldreda remembered no more the cottage, with its one empty chair—nor the miserable mother, nor the little sister straining her weeping eyes along the lonely road.

The mortal maiden became the Elle-king's bride, and lived in the hill for seven long years;—at least, so they seemed in Elfinland, where time passes like the passing of a strain of music, that dies but to be again renewed. Little thought had she of the world above-ground, for in the hill-palace was continual pleasure, and magnificence without end. No remembrance of lost kindred troubled her, for she sat in the Dronningstolen, and all the elfin people bowed down before the wife of the mighty Kong Tolv.

She might have lived so always, with no desire ever to go back to earth, save that one day she saw trickling down through the palace roof a pearly stream. The elves fled away, for they said it was some mortal weeping on the grassy hill overhead. But Hyldreda stayed and looked on until the stream settled into a clear pellucid pool. A sweet mirror it made, and the Hill-king's bride ever loved to see her own beauty. So she went and gazed down into the shining water.

There she beheld—not the image of the elfin-queen, but of the peasant maid, with her mantle of crimson woof, her coarse dress, and her black crucifix. She turned away in disgust, but soon her people brought

her elfin mirrors, where she could see her present self, gorgeously clad, and a thousand times more fair. The sight kindled in her heart a proud desire.

She said to her lord, "Let me go back for a little while to my native village, and my ancient home, that I may show them all my splendour, and my greatness. Let me enter, sitting in my gilded chariot, with the four white horses, and feel myself as queen-like as the lady I once saw beneath the oak-wood."

Kong Tolv laughed, and assented. "But," he said, "remain thy own proud self the while. The first sigh, the first tear, and I carry thee back into the hill with shame."

So Hyldreda left the fairy-palace, and came sweeping through the village, with a pageant worthy a queen. Thus, in her haughtiness, after seven years had gone by, she stood at her mother's door.

Seven years, none of which had cast one shadow on the daughter's beauty. But time and grief together had bowed the mother almost to the verge of the grave. The one recognized not the other, until Resa came between; little Resa, who looked her sister's olden self, blooming in the sweetness of seventeen, Nothing to her was the magnificence of the beautiful guest; she only saw Hyldreda, the lost and found.

"Where hast thou been?" said the mother, doubtfully, when, in answer to all their caresses, the stately lady only looked on them with a proud smile. "Who gave thee those grand dresses, and put the matron's veil upon thy hair?"

"I am the Hill-king's wife," said Hyldreda. "I dwell in a gorgeous palace, and sit on a queen's throne."

"God preserve thee!" answered the mother. But Hyldreda turned away, for Kong Tolv had commanded her never to hear or utter the one holy Name. She began to inquire about her long-forgotten home, but half-carelessly, as if she had no interest in it now.

"And who was it," she asked, "that wept on the hill-side until the tears dropped through, staining my palace walls?"

"I," answered Resa, blushing; and then Hyldreda perceived that, young as she was, the girl wore the matron's head-tire. "I, sitting there with my babe, wept to think of my poor sister who died long ago, and never knew the sweetness of wifehood and motherhood. And almost it grieved me, to think that my love had blotted out the bitterness of her memory even from the heart of Esbern Lynge."

At the name, proudly laughed the elder sister, "Take thy husband and be happy, girl; I envy thee not; I am the wife of the great Hill-king."

"And does thy lord love thee? Does he sit beside thee at eve, and let thee lean thy tired head on his breast, as Esbern does with me? And hast thou young children dancing about thy feet, and a little blue-eyed one to creep dove-like to thy heart at nights, as mine does? Say, dear sister, art thou as happy as I?"

Hyldreda paused. Earth's sweet ties arose before her, and the grandeur of her lot seemed only loneliness.

Forgetting her lord's command, she sighed, she even wept one regretful tear; and that moment in her presence stood Kong Tolv.

"Kill me, but save my mother, my sister," cried the wife, imploringly. The prayer was needless; *they* saw not the Elle-king, and he marked not them—he only bore away Hyldreda, singing mockingly in her ear something of the same rhyme which had bound her his :—

"Complainest thou here all drearilie—
Camest thou not of thyself in the hill to me?
And stayest thou here thy lot to deplore?
Camest thou not of thyself in at my door?"

When the mother and sister of Hyldreda lifted up their eyes, they saw nothing but a cloud of dust sweeping past the cottage door, they heard nothing but the ancient elder-tree howling aloud as its branches were tossed about in a gust of wintry wind.

Kong Tolv took back to the hill his mortal bride. There he set her in a golden chair, and brought to her to drink a silver horn of elfin-wine, in which he had dropped an ear of wheat. At the first draught, she forgot the village where she had dwelt—at the second, she forgot the sister who had been her darling—at the third, she forgot the mother who bore her. Again she rejoiced in the glories of the fairy-palace, and in the life of never-ceasing pleasure.

Month after month rolled by—by her scarce counted, or counted only in jest, as she would number a handful

of roses, all held so fast and sure, that none could fall or fade;—or as she would mark one by one the little waves of a rivulet whose source was eternally flowing.

Hyldreda thought no more of any earthly thing, until there came, added to her own, a young, new life. When her beautiful babe, half-elf, half-mortal, nestled in her woman's breast, it wakened there the fountain of human love, and of long-forgotten memories.

“Oh! let me go home once—once more,” she implored of her lord. “Let me go to ask my mother's forgiveness, and above all, to crave the church's blessing on this my innocent babe.”

Kong Tolv frowned, and then looked sad. For it is the one sorrow of the Elle-people, that they, with all others of the elfin race, are shut out from Heaven's mercy. Their lives are counted by centuries not years; but they have no hope of immortality. Therefore do they often steal mortal wives, and strive to have their children christened according to holy rite, in order to participate in the blessings granted to the offspring of Adam.

“Do as thou wilt,” the Hill-king answered; “but know, there awaits a penalty. In exchange for a soul, must be given a life.”

His dark saying terrified the young mother for a time, but soon the sweet, strange wiles of her elfin-babe beguiled her into renewed happiness; so that her longing faded away.

The child grew not like a mortal child. An unearthly beauty was in its face; wondrous, precocious

signs marked it from its birth. Its baby-speech was very wisdom. Its baby-smile was full of thought. The mother read her own soul—the pure soul that was hers of yore—in her infant's eyes.

One day when Hyldreda was following the child in its play, she noticed it disappear through what seemed the outlet of the fairy-palace, which outlet she herself had never been able to find. She forgot that her boy was of elfin as well as of mortal race. Out it passed, the mother eagerly pursuing, until she found herself with the child in a meadow near the village of Skjelskör, where years ago she had often played. It was on a Sunday morning, and cheerfully yet solemnly rang out the chapel-bells. All the sounds and sights of earth came back upon her, with a longing that would not be restrained.

In the white frozen grass, for it was winter-time, knelt the wife of Kong Tolv, holding fast to her bosom the elfin babe, who shivered at every blast of wind, yet, shivering, seemed to smile. Hyldreda knelt until the chapel-bells ceased at service-time. And then there came bursting from her lips the long-sealed prayers, the prayers of her childhood. While she breathed them, the rich fairy garments crumbled from her, and she remained clad in the coarse dress she wore when Kong Tolv carried her away; save that they hung in miserable tatters, as if worn for years, and through their rents the icy wind pierced her bosom, so that the heart within might have sunk and died, but for the ever-abiding warmth of maternal love.

That told her how in one other mother's heart there must be warmth still.

"I will go home," she murmured; "I will say, Mother, take me in and save me, or else I die!" And so, when the night closed, and all the villagers were safe at home, and none could mock at her and her misery, the poor desolate one crept to her mother's door.

It had been open to her even when she came in her pride; how would it be closed against her sorrow and humility? And was there ever a true mother's breast, in which while life yet throbbed there was not a refuge for a repentant child?

Hyldreda found shelter and rest. But the little elfin babe, unused to the air of earth, uttered continual moanings. At night, the strange eyes never closed, but looked at her with a dumb entreaty. And tenfold returned the mother's first desire, that her darling should become a "christened child."

Much the old grandame gloried in this, looking with distrust on the pining, withered babe. But keenly upon Hyldreda's memory came back the saying of Kong Tolv, that for a soul would be exchanged a life. It must be *hers*. That, doubtless, was the purchase; and thus had Heaven ordained the expiation of her sin. If so, meekly she would offer it, so that Heaven would admit into its mercy her beloved child.

It was in the night—in the cold white night, that the Widow Kalm, with her daughter and the mysterious babe, came to the chapel of Skjelskör. All the way thither they had been followed by strange, unearthly noises; and as they passed beneath the oak-wood, it seemed as if the overhanging branches were transformed into giant hands, that evermore snatched at the child. But in vain; for the mother held it fast, and on its little breast she had laid the wooden cross which she herself used to wear when a girl. Bitterly the infant had wailed, but when they crossed the threshold of the chapel, it ceased, and a smile broke over its face—a smile pure and saintly, such as little children wear, lying in a sleep so beautiful that the bier seems like the cradle.

The mother beheld it, and thought, What if her foreboding should be true; that the moment which opened the gate of heaven's mercy unto her babe, should close upon herself life and life's sweetnesses? But she felt no fear.

“Let me kiss thee once again, my babe, my darling!” she murmured; “perhaps I may never kiss thee more. Even now, I feel as if my eyes were growing dark, and thy little face were gliding from my sight. But I can let thee go, my sweet! God will take care of thee, and keep thee safe, even amidst this bitter world.”

She clasped and kissed the child once more, and kneeling, calm, but very pale, she awaited whatever might be her doom.

The priest, performing by stealth what he almost deemed a desecration of the hallowed rite, began to read the ceremony over the fairy babe. All the while, it looked at him with those mysterious eyes, so lately opened to the world, yet which seemed to express the emotions of a whole existence. But, when the sprinkled water touched them, they closed, softly, slowly, like a blue flower at night.

The mother, still living, and full of thankful wonder that she did live, took from the priest's arms her recovered treasure, her Christian child. It lay all smiling, but it lifted not its eyes: the colour was fading on its lips, and its little hands were growing cold. For it—not for her, had been the warning. It had rendered up its little life, and received an immortal soul.

For years after this, there abode in the village of Skjelskör a woman whom some people thought was an utter stranger; for no one so grave, and at the same time so good, was ever known among the light-hearted people of Zealand. Others said that if any one could come back alive from fairy land, the woman must be Hyldreda Kalm. But as later generations arose, they mocked at the story of Kong Tolv and the palace under the hill, and considered the whole legend but an allegory, the moral of which they did not fail to preach to their fair young daughters continually.

Nevertheless, this woman had surely once lived, for

her memory, embalmed by its own rich virtues, long lingered in the place where she had dwelt. She must have died there too, for they pointed out her grave, and a smaller one beside it, though whose that was, none knew. There was a tradition that when she died—it was on a winter night, and the clock was just striking *twelve*—there arose a stormy wind which swept through the neighbouring oak-wood, laying every tree prostrate on the ground. And from that hour there was no record of the Elle-people or the mighty Kong Tolv having been ever again seen in Zealand.

EROTION.

A Tale of Ancient Greece.

CHAPTER I.

IN the early days of Greece, when the gods yet spoke with men, before the oracles were silent in the groves of Dodona, and while the nymphs and dryads still lingered by wood and fountain, there was in Taurica a temple consecrated to Diana. Night and day in the sanctuary the virgin priestesses of the goddess kept vigil round her statue. Men said that this treasure was not the work of human hands, but had fallen from heaven. The elders of the generation well remembered that when the temple was finished, the priesthood who mourned over the yet vacant shrine of the goddess, had one night left it in moonlight solitude, and lo! next morning a beautiful statue of the divinity was in its place. How such glorious loveliness could have sprung to life from the cold marble, unless by an immortal touch, no one could imagine, but all wor-

shipped the form as a token direct from heaven that their piety had been accepted. Not many days after, at the very foot of the statue, died a pale youth, whom no one knew, save that he had haunted the temple for months. Some kind hand gave him a tomb, and his name was never spoken; the worshippers worshipped, and no man dreamed that their idol was only divine in that it came from the hand of an unknown, but heaven-born and immortal genius.

This old tale was now forgotten, but far and wide spread the fame and renown of the shrine. Pilgrims came from all lands to kneel before the statue which was believed to have fallen from heaven, and brought back to their distant homes wondrous tales of its divine loveliness. Men spoke with reverence of the oracle of Diana Taurica, and the white pinnacles of the temple were looked upon from afar with enthusiastic adoration. But after a time these worshippers from foreign lands came no more. It was whispered that one of the pretended devotees had offered sacrilege to the goddess, and that Diana had exacted a fearful expiation. The real secret was never breathed; but for years after, many strangers who entered the temple were seen no more on earth. Still the white-robed priestesses encircled the flower-crowned shrine, and the statue of the goddess shone in imperishable beauty.

It was the yearly festival of Diana Taurica, and the temple was filled with the music of choral hymns, and the odours of incense-laden sacrifices. Throughout the long summer day the goddess was worshipped in

her character of huntress. No longer hovering silently in the dim light of the temple, the virgin priestesses laid aside their white garments for a sylvan dress, and rushed to the open woods, where the day was spent in wild joy, and sports such as befitted the nymphs of Diana. Upon these revels no unhallowed eye dared look; such intrusion was instantly punished with death.

But when twilight drew on, began the worship of Cynthia, the goddess of the night. As the full moon arose, there was heard from the temple a hymn, sweet yet plaintive, and solemn withal. Through the deserted streets wound the maiden train, led by the high-priestess. Then came the initiated, who had long been devoted to the service of the temple, and afterwards walked the young novices, crowned with poppy-garlands, and chanting hymns in the still and solemn moonlight. Last of all came the young maidens of the city, who alone were permitted to witness and share in the solemnities.

These ceremonies ended with the twilight. When night came, the mysterious rites of Diana Triformis were celebrated. There, in her character of Queen of the land of silence and death, Hecate was propitiated; but how, or by what unearthly ceremonies, was known to none except the higher order of the priesthood. The golden curtains of the inner sanctuary were drawn, and nothing was heard or seen by those who waited without, crouching with veiled faces, or lying prostrate on the marble floor. These chosen worshippers

were all young girls, some hardly past childhood; self-dedicated, or else vowed by their parents to the service of Diana. Many of them were beautiful; some with the pure, pale, statue-like features of their clime; others with dazzling golden locks, and cheeks like rose-leaves. One of them—she was fairest of all—knelt motionless, not in fear, but with her head uplifted in an ecstatic enthusiasm that dilated her child-like face, until it wore an almost divine aspect. One of the elder novices drew near, and looked at her, saying in a whisper, as if she trembled at the sound of her own voice:—

“Erotation, how is it with thee?”

Erotation moved not nor answered.

“Hush! Phrene, speak not to her,” said another maiden, fearfully. “Seest thou not that the power of the goddess is upon her?” And the young girls stole away from their companion, whose wild eyes were fixed on vacancy, as if beholding what was invisible to all the rest.

“Diana the mighty has called her,” whispered Phrene; “she was never like one of us.”

“And none know whence she came, for she was brought up from a babe in the temple, an orphan, and homeless,” said the violet-eyed Cydippe.

“It is the goddess’s will, doubtless, that the lot this night should fall upon her,” murmured Leuconœ; and then a heavy silence gathered over all the maidens, for they trembled at the fearful ordeal which one of them, they knew not who, must go through in

that long, lonely vigil, before the statue of Diana Triformis.

At last, from the dead stillness which pervaded the sanctuary, arose a faint melody, like the wind passing over the strings of a harp; clouds of incense rolled in fragrant wreaths from above the golden screen, filling the temple with luxurious perfume, that steeped every sense with its intoxicating power. Then the curtains were lifted, and, with her long black garments sweeping the ground, came forth the high-priestess, the chosen of Diana,—Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon.

Beautiful was she, as when she was led to the sacrifice at Aulis—but it was the beauty of a marble statue. There was no trace of life in her face, except in the dark, unfathomable eyes,

“Orb within orb, deeper than sleep or death.”

Her black robes moved without a sound, and her unbound hair twined like a golden serpent round her bare white arms, which were folded on her breast. As she advanced, the young novices moved aside, all but the still-kneeling Erotation, who remained immovable. The high-priestess looked upon the child, and touched her with a light finger. A shiver came over her frame, she lifted her eyes, and glanced round wildly, like one awaking from a trance.

“Arise, my daughter,” said Iphigenia, in a voice that sounded sweet, and yet solemn; and the maiden rose up, and crept silently to her companions.

And now the golden urn was brought forth, that the

fatal lot might be drawn, which appointed one of the young novices to the awful vigil. Each year one of the band was thus chosen, who, after this initiation, was received into the order of priestesses, or else was banished the temple, and never more seen by human eye. That the ordeal was terrible, all knew well, for many a frail creature had been found in the gray light of morning, dead on the marble pavement; while those who passed through that fearful night, never again recovered the sweet smiling face of youth. But what the trial was none could tell, for each novice took a solemn vow never to reveal it. No marvel was it that many a bright cheek grew pale, and many a lip quivered with fear, as the maidens advanced one by one to the urn.

The lot fell upon Erotion. Then rose up the wild chorus of the priestesses, as they closed round the chosen one of Diana, the pale, silent child, who stood without word or movement while they took away her novice's tunic, and robed her in a long garment of white wool, placing on her head the consecrated poppy-wreath, sacred to the goddess.

"Dost thou fear?" said the high-priestess, as the young girl bent at her feet, ere entering the sanctuary. "Dost thou fear, my daughter?"

"I have no fear," murmured Erotion; and there was indeed no terror on that fair young face, but an expression of mingled awe and rapture.

Iphigenia laid her hands on the child's head—

"The goddess calls and must be obeyed. Go, and

be thou fortunate ; for the influence of her whose name is unutterable is upon thee."

The child arose—the golden curtains were lifted—they closed upon her, and the awful vigil was begun.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was dead silence in the temple; the lamps burned dimly on the altar, and threw long shadows on the wall; everywhere else the darkness seemed like a visible presence—a gloom that could be felt, gathering around, and taking wild and horrible shapes, the more horrible because they were undefined. Beneath the veiled statue of the goddess crouched Erotion; her large dark eyes were not drooping, but fixed steadfastly on the image—her head was not buried in her robe, but raised fearlessly. Still there was no sound, no movement—the statue moved not under its drapery; there was no presence in the temple save that of night and darkness, and these had no terrors to the heart of the lonely child.

By degrees it seemed as if the poppies which bound her hair were piercing with their dreamy influence unto her brain. Her eye-lids closed, her cheek fell upon her hand, and a delicious numbness, which was scarcely sleep, absorbed the senses of Erotion. Gradually the veiled image upon which she looked appeared to move underneath its drapery; the marble

dissolved into folds that took the appearance of mist, and two strangely-beautiful eyes gleamed from out that vapoury shroud. The child felt them upon her, looking into her very soul, and binding her with a spell of stillness, so that she could not turn away from that mysterious gaze. At last words came to her trembling lips, and Erotion said—

“What wouldst thou, O goddess? Behold, I am here. Art thou she whose name I may not utter?”

An answer came—it was not from the animated statue, but a voice, an “airy tongue,” like that which poets hear in the wind, in the rustling of the trees, in the stirring of the grass. So faint was it, that whence it came Erotion knew not; but to her opened ears it was distinct and intelligible.

“I am the spirit whom mankind worship under the name of Diana, the spirit of purity, existing in heaven, on earth, and in the land of the dead. I have no form, but men give me such shape, and ascribe to me such symbols as are easiest of comprehension to the human mind. What is purer than the moon in heaven, or the life of a woodland virgin on earth? But these are only personifications of my being. Mankind invest me with a nature half human, half divine; they build me temples and shrines, yet I am everywhere—a spiritual essence, needing neither prayers nor sacrifices.”

As the voice spoke, boldness and clearness came to the young maiden’s soul; every cloud of fear and

mortal weakness was swept away; her intellect expanded, and the child of fourteen years felt and apprehended as a woman, nay, as an angel.

“Yet, O spirit,” said Erotion, “thou sufferest us to worship thee as a goddess!”

“Because man’s piety clings so closely to outward forms; yet those whom I choose know me as I am—therefore have I chosen thee, Erotion.”

“Can the divine thus regard the human?” said the child.

“Look by thy side, and thou shalt know.”

Erotation turned, and lo! on either hand there stood beside her two forms, of stature far above mortal height. One seemed a spirit of light, with floating garments, woven as it were of sunbeams; the other, dark, gloomy, and half concealed by an ebon mantle, that veiled the face and form. The child looked in wonder; but, even while she beheld, the phantoms melted into air.

“These are thy good and evil genii,” said the invisible voice; “they were with thee at thy birth, and will follow thee until death. It is they who inspire thee with thoughts holy or sinful, sweet or bitter; who produce all those strange and warring impulses which rule thy life. They have power over thee, but not over thy destiny, except so far as it is under thine own control, according as thou listenest to one or other of these guardian spirits.”

“I see! I feel!” cried the child. “I dreamed of this before—now I know it. Life is a mystery indeed!”

and Erotion's voice sank, solemn and trembling. "Tell me, what is death?"

No answer came; but a touch, light as that of summer air, pressed Erotion's lips and eyes. Immediately the lids drooped; she beheld no more the sanctuary or the image, but a dim haze, through which myriads of shapes, some horrible, some lovely, were visible, like bright floating spectres, that glide before the eyes ere slumber comes on. Faintly in the child's ear came ærial music, sweeter than she had ever before heard, even in dreams; her breathing ceased, and yet it was no pain; her limbs relaxed, and a frozen calm came over them. A voice, which she knew was that of the spirit, whispered, "Erotion, this is death;" and then she felt no more.

The child awoke as out of a long sleep, and found herself wandering on what seemed a desolate shore. Before, in the distance, lay the dim and gloomy sea: behind, clouds shut out the view. Those who reached that shore might no more look behind. The child glanced fearfully round her, but could see nothing except the lonely shore, and the terrible, waveless sea, that looked as though no living thing had ever stirred upon or beneath its waters. Erotion wrung her hands, but lo! palm met palm as air meets air—they were nought but outward semblance. She lifted her voice to cry aloud, but no sound echoed in the stillness of that fearful place. She glided over the shore, but her feet felt not the sands over which they passed, and left no prints behind. Again Erotion's lips strove to utter

a sound; all was still; but an answer came—a voice, which the child knew well, murmured—

“Fear not, Erotion; I am here. I rule in the land of silence as upon earth. Come with me, and thou shalt cross the ocean which separates life from eternity.”

Impelled by an invisible power, Erotion reached the margin of that dark sea. It neither ebbed nor flowed; no light waves danced upon its surface, which was of one unvaried dusky hue, as if an eternal thunder-cloud hung over it, and was reflected in its mysterious depths. Only one slender thread of brightness, answering to the milky way across the night-heaven, made a pathway over it. The child stood trembling on its verge.

“Erotion, place thy foot on the ocean without fear,” said the voice at her side.

Erotation did so, and it yielded not. Swiftly she glided along the silver line, with a motion like that which is felt in dreams, when we seem borne through the air invisibly. The desolate shore grew dim as the child sped on; the clouds furled off from the sky; the sea beneath her feet grew pellucid and blue, and melodious with dancing ripples. On, on, until in the dim horizon arose a golden cloud, which gradually formed itself into a land, beautiful as Paradise. Erotion beheld vales, and purple hills, trees, fountains and rivers; among which flitted, like fire-flies on eastern nights, bright and lovely forms, transparent as vapours, and yet bearing mortal sem-

blance. As her feet touched the golden strand, she heard glorious music; she strove to join in the heavenly melody, and strains came from her lips, so sweet, so divine, that her soul was ravished with the angelic harmony.

"Thou hast passed through the Ocean of Death," said the voice which still accompanied her; "thou art now in the land of immortality."

And never, save in dreams, did mortal behold a land so glorious. It was most like those landscapes we trace sometimes in the sky, where snowy hills, and purple valleys, and silver streams, seemed formed in the clouds of sunset, vanishing as soon as formed. But here there was no night to dim the never-fading view; for though like earth, as, in its glorified beauty, it sprang from the hand of the Fashioner, still it was not earth.

The child's spirit lifted its airy hands in rapture; and then glided toward the green plain that sloped to the sea, the unseen voice leading. Thus she passed, until she came nearer to those beautiful shadows which were flitting about on every side. Human they seemed, but it was humanity exalted into perfect beauty.

"Who are these shapes that I see?" asked the child.

"They are the spirits of the dead," answered the guiding voice. "Thou seest that each bears the face and form which it wore on earth; yet they are only shadows, for the soul is of itself impalpable. They enjoy perfect bliss; and those delights which the spirit

felt while in its clay-vestures, are theirs now unalloyed — love in its essence, knowledge, wisdom, genius, every sensation in which the body had no share; and those who on earth most cherished these spiritual pleasures, enjoy them highest now.”

“And oh!” said Erotation, “if those are the souls of the wise and holy dead, where are those of the unrighteous?”

A soft sigh, like the closing of a flower at sunset, was heard by the child, and the voice answered sadly—

“We may not speak of them; they are not here—they sleep.”

Without another word, Erotation glided on until she came to a green recess, golden-wove with sunbeam threads, that made a fairy network through the trees. There, hymning glorious poetry, such as never earthly bard conceived, reclined a shadow which seemed a youth. His face—and it was the same which had grown pale and sunken in life—now shone with divine beauty; the golden hair waved, and the sweet eyes looked as they did on earth.

“I lived—I suffered—I died!” cried the poet in his song; “and yet men knew me not. I brought with me fire from heaven, and it was not seen; yet I cherished it in my bosom—it warmed and cheered me, and I was happy.”

The child drew near, and her spirit stood face to face with the poet’s soul. Erotation spoke, for she felt no fear—

“And yet thou didst die unknown, and hast left behind no immortal name?”

“Not so,” said the shadow; “for men sing my songs. I live again in their hearts, though they never heard my name. Age after age they will think my thoughts, repeat my words, hold me as a dear friend, and honour me as a great teacher. This is the only immortality on earth.”

And as the child turned she heard from another celestial bower the echoing of the same song. There stood another soul, like the poet's in radiance; and lo! wherever the shadow turned its beaming eyes, lovely pictures appeared in air; the artist had now no need of the frail hand which lay mingled with earth's dust, to embody this divine conception.

“Genius is the only immortality!” echoed the shadow. “I laboured, I perished, and no man heeded; yet it is nought to me now; I am blessed. No friendly foot hovers near my grave, but I am not forgotten even on earth. Do not men bow down before my work?—do not they call it divine?—my glorious ideal!—do they not adore it, thinking it came from the finger of a god? and yet the hand that made it is now a heap of dust. But the work remains, and I live still in the creation of my genius.”

Erotation knew not the form of the spirit which thus spake; but her awakened soul told her that she beheld the youth who had given to the temple of Diana Taurica its goddess—and died.

Onward went the spirit of the child, through

meadows and valleys thick with imperishable flowers—over streams that sang ever their own sweet melodies—amidst woods whose leaves knew no withering; and still the invisible voice followed. At last Erotion came where the sunshine grew less bright, the flowers less beautiful, while a thin silver mist, like twilight vapours, obscured the view. Through it there floated shadows like the rest, but less brilliant, while on each face rested a pensive sweetness that was almost sad. Again a question rose to the child's lips, but ere it was uttered the voice answered—

“These are they who have once erred, suffered, and repented on earth. They are happy, yet there still remains a faint shade of sadness—the memory of the past—until every sorrow which their error caused to others on earth shall have passed away.”

As the voice ceased, one of the spirits glided towards the child. It bore the semblance of a fair woman: the face was pale, but oh, how heavenly sweet! Erotion had seen it in her dreams; it had looked down upon her from among the stars in her night-watches. She had not known it then, save as a sweet fancy; but now her senses were all unclouded, and the child felt that she was near the spirit of her mother, whom on earth she had never beheld. The shadow approached: soft arms clasped Erotion—sweet kisses were upon her eyelids; for death cannot change love, least of all the love of a mother.

“Has death freed thee, too, oh, my daughter!” whispered the spirit, and bright pearls—they were

not tears now—shone in the celestial eyes; “then soon shall all trace of suffering caused by me be swept from earth, and I shall be entirely blessed.”

“Art thou not so now?” said the child.

Again that mournful look rested on the face of the spirit.

“I sinned—I broke the solemn vows of a priestess for earthly love—I carried a deceitful heart to the holy shrine; yet I paid in death a fearful atonement—more fearful still was the thought of thee. Cruel was the mercy that delayed the punishment until thy birth, to make it only more bitter. But ere death came, I met it with a calm and penitent heart, and it waited me to rest and peace. Here I await thee—and one more. The day is now come.”

“Not yet, not yet!” uttered the mysterious voice, and Erotion felt herself borne away as on the wings of a summer breeze into a lovely glade. There spirits diviner and more beautiful in shape than any she had yet beheld, were floating over the grass, or listening to ethereal music. They were crowned with stars, and bore golden palm-branches, and their brightness was such, that the child veiled her eyes from the sight. But they came near and lifted her in their dazzling arms, while their song rose loud and triumphant—

“We are blessed, we are blessed! we died joyfully for what was dearest to us on earth; we feared not the lonely shore nor the gloomy sea, and we enjoy a rapturous immortality. O spirit! loosed from the

earth-bonds for a time, behold thy destiny—thou shalt be one of us—rejoice, rejoice! Such a death is sweet—sweet as a babe's slumber—such an immortality is unspeakably glorious. Erotion, fulfil thy destiny, and come to us."

The child seemed to fall from that divine embrace, down, down through mists and darkness unfathomable—time and space, myriads of ages, and millions of leagues appeared to gather behind her, until some soft touch was laid upon her eyes and lips, and Erotion awoke from her trance.

She lay on the floor of the sanctuary; the sacred lamp was nearly extinguished, and the gray morning twilight rested on the veiled statue of Diana Taurica, which stood immoveable in its white shroud.

CHAPTER III.

NEVER more after that night did the vowed one of Diana look or speak as a child. Erotion was not sad, but none ever heard from her lips the light-hearted laughter of girlhood. Her eyes were of a dreamy depth, and had a strange, mysterious look, as if her soul saw without the aid of mere bodily organs. She walked through the world as though she beheld it not; shut up in herself, her outward life seemed mechanical, while her inner mind was ever brooding over things beyond earth. Men looked upon her as one on whom the spirit of the goddess had fallen; the few words

which dropped from her lips were held as oracles; no eye followed her — no power controlled her. Wrapped in her priestess' veil, the young maiden passed from the temple to the city, from the city to the sylvan forest, or the lone sea-shore, and no one stayed her. She passed, like a spirit of purity and beauty; wild, untutored men looked and turned aside in reverence, as if Diana herself were among them; children beheld with wonder one who was like themselves, and yet so unlike. But one and all regarded Erotion as the chosen of the goddess.

As months and years gathered over the head of the maiden, the strange spell which had overshadowed her childhood seemed to grow stronger. Even the vowed novices thought of their own beauty in girlish vanity, and talked of the world outside the temple walls; but no such feelings ever disturbed Erotion's unworldly nature. Beautiful she was, but it was the beauty of an angel, not of a woman; no eye could look upon her and mingle her idea with that of earthly love.

In the long summer days, Erotion went out in the forest; there, in the deepest glades, she wandered alone. Sometimes children who were suffered to run wild in the woods, came home and told of a strange and lovely face which they had seen gleaming through the trees, and mothers remembered that it was a place haunted by Dryad and Oread, and thought it no marvel that such should love to look upon beauteous infancy. Often, too, the wayfaring peasant heard,

above the melody of hidden waters, a sweet and mysterious voice, and said it was the Naiad singing beside her fountain.

But more than the green plains and the woody recesses, did the young priestess love the sea-shore. A spell for which she could not account drew her ever to the margin of that dark sea, now called the Euxine, on whose shore the city stood. Its gloomy billows, its wild coast, its frowning rocks, had for her an inexplicable charm; it might be that they recalled the memory of her wondrous dream in the temple, if dream indeed it were, which seemed so real. In the splendour of noon, in the dusky eve, in storm and in calm, Erotion haunted the shore and watched the sea. Mariners from afar saw her white garments floating on high cliffs and in sand-bound caves, which hitherto only the sea-bird had visited, and told strange tales of ocean nymphs and coral-crowned Nereids.

In this solitude, Erotion pondered on her destiny; the winds and ever-murmuring waves were her teachers and companions; they seemed to speak to her as the invisible voice had done in her dream, of things great and wonderful—of the marvels of nature—of the life of the soul—of poetry, genius, and all-pervading love. Often she thought of her own strange and lonely life,—of her mysterious birth, and again she felt the embrace of the spirit who had called her “child,” and whose mystic words she had heard in the vision. Then Erotion’s thoughts turned from the dark and unexplained past to the future, still more vague

and shadowy ; and amidst all these musings came pealing the farewell chant which she had last heard in the land of immortality—" Erotion, Erotion, fulfil thy destiny, and come ! "

It was on one of those evenings when the glories of the setting sun might truly bring to a Greek imagination the idea of Hyperion in his golden chariot, or of Tithonus the bridegroom sinking into the wavy arms of Thetis,—that Erotion wandered along by the sea-shore. She watched the sun in his cloud-pavilion, and thought that an orb so glorious was a fit dwelling for a god. She remembered the legends of the priestesses concerning the elder race of gods — of Hyperion the Titan, whose throne was in the sun, and before whose giant beauty even that of the young Apollo grew dim ; how that he and his brethren had been overthrown by a mightier power than even their own, and that Olympian Jove was now worshipped by mankind. And then came across the memory of the inspired maiden the words which she had listened to from the voice, that even these were shadows, and that the gods of Olympus were but personifications of the various powers of nature, or of holy sentiments, thus made tangible objects of worship for the darkened mind of man.

Absorbed in thoughts like these, Erotion saw not that black clouds had gathered over the fair evening sky, that the waves were rising, and the whirlwind was heard in the air. The sea-birds shrieked, and flew to the crevices of the rocks, against which dashed the

billows thundering and heavily. Nearer came the tempest, bearing destruction on its wings, as if the powers of earth, heaven, and sea were at warfare, and were mingled together in deadly confusion. Through all this fearful contest went the maiden, her long black hair tossed by the winds, her garments torn, her feet bleeding, and leaving their red traces over the sand, until she came to a little cave she knew. She stood at its entrance, and the struggling moonbeam that glimmered through the edge of a black cloud, lighting up her form, made her seem like a wandering ghost by the side of the gloomy river of Tartarus.

As she stood and looked into the thick darkness of the cave, a man's voice, hoarse with terror, sounded from within—

“Iole! Iole! art thou come to visit me? Has no tomb yet received thy clay, that thou must wander here as an avenging spirit? Iole! Iole! depart, and let me die!”

And the cry became a shriek of horror as Erotion drew nigh, and bent over the speaker—a gray-haired man, whose foreign garments, covered with sea-weed, and bruised limbs, bespoke him a shipwrecked stranger, driven thither by the storm.

“Fear me not,” said the sweet voice of Erotion; “I am no spirit, but a woman, a priestess of the temple which is nigh here, the temple of Diana Taurica.”

A cry such as only the wildest agony forces from man's lips, was uttered by the stranger—

“Diana Taurica—a priestess!” he shrieked. “Oh,

ye gods, am I then here! It is no dream; thou art indeed Iole. Tortured spirit, pardon! I knew not of thy vows! I knew not that to love thee was a sin. Spirit of Iole, pardon!"

Erotation shuddered as she listened to these ravings.

"Stranger, I am not called Iole; I am Erotation, and never until now did mine eyes behold thee. Tell me who thou art, and why thou speakest thus wildly?"

"I am Tisamenes of Crete," answered the stranger, in a calmer voice. "Seventeen years ago, the fatal wrath of the sea-gods threw me on this coast. I saw, wooed, and won a fair virgin, named Iole; I knew not her birth or fortunes, save that she loved me—oh, too well! Maiden, like thee she was a priestess of Diana. Her punishment was death. She betrayed me not; I escaped. Traitor that I was, who dared not die with Iole! But she was revenged; night and day the furies haunt me; and she, too, O maiden—she stands and looks like thee—like thee; with her marble features, her dark floating hair, her mournful eyes. Off, off! look not at me with those eyes—they are the eyes of Iole!"

As Erotation listened, her stature dilated, and wild excitement shone in her countenance. She lifted up her arms in the moonlight, which grew broader and brighter as the storm passed away, and cried—

"O great Diana, pardon! The will of the gods be done." Then she turned to the stranger, and said, in tones low and tremulous—"I never beheld father or mother. I was born in the temple sixteen years

ago. They told me my mother was a priestess, who sinned and died; but I knew not her name till now. O stranger! O *father*! let me kiss thy garment's hem, for I am surely Iole's child."

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGHOUT the moonlight summer's night which succeeded the tempest, the father and daughter sat together in the cave. Erotion bound up the bruised limbs of the shipwrecked man with her priestess's veil; she dipped her long tresses in the cool water, and laid them on his brow; she called him by the sweet name which her lips had never uttered before—"Father, dear father!" and the madness passed away from the soul of Tisamenes of Crete. He sat with his daughter's hand in his, looking into her calm sweet face, in which the wild enthusiasm of the vowed and inspired priestess had given place to an expression of tenderness and human love.

"Now thou lookest like Iole," he would say: "not the fearful vision for which I first mistook thee, but like Iole in the days of our early love. I knew not but that the murderers destroyed the babe with the mother. The gods be praised, that through sorrow, shipwreck, and pain, I have found mine own child—the child of the dead Iole. I will stay here; I will never leave thee, Erotion, since that is thy name—but I can only call thee my daughter, my sweet daughter. We will not be parted more."

As the morning dawned, Tisamenes tried to raise himself from the floor of the cave.

“I am faint, my child,” he said, feebly,—“faint from hunger. Take me with thee to the city, where I may find food.”

Erotation turned away, and wept.

“Oh, my father!” she said, “I thought not of this in my joy; the gods have pity upon us! Dost thou not know that for these sixteen years, as an atonement for thy—oh, not thy sin, my father; never will my lips utter such word against thee;—but that since then, all strangers whom the sea casts on our shore are sacrificed to the vengeance of the goddess. Thou wilt be murdered; and I, how shall I save thee?”

“Is it even so?” murmured Tisamenes. “Then the fates have brought me hither, that the same hands which shed Iole’s blood may be imbrued in mine. I am content, since I have found thee, Erotation. Let me die.”

“Thou shalt not die, my father!” cried Erotation, in a voice of shrill agony, which startled the very birds that the first beams of daylight had awakened from their cavern-nook. They flew over the heads of father and daughter, uttering discordant screams.

Tisamenes buried his face in his robe, and spoke no more; but Erotation, after a thoughtful silence, said quickly and decisively—

“My father, thou must stay here. It is bright morning; I will go in search of food—not to the temple—let them think I have perished in the storm. If

no man will give me food, I will beg; is it not for thee? Lie here in peace, my father; I will come again—thou shalt not die.”

And Erotion, wrapping around her the fragments of her white robe, with her young face, no longer hidden by her priestess's veil, now pale, now glowing with shame, as curious eyes were cast upon its beauty, passed through solitary and devious ways into the city. She heard a wailing from the temple, and saw a band of the sacred attendants come from the shore, with half-extinguished torches. As they passed her hiding-place, they talked, with low tones, of the lost priestess; of how, amidst the conflict of the elements, Diana had carried away her own. Then Erotion sprang up where she had nestled beside a vine-dresser's cottage, tore the rich bunches of grapes that hung beside her, and sped away like a hunted deer.

Ere long, Erotion was beside her almost dying father, with his head on her knee, placing between his parched lips the cooling fruit, and weeping over him with a fulness of joy that was utterly regardless of future sorrow.

“We will stay here, my father,” she said, “until thou art recovered, and then, in the dead of night, we will go far away to the wild forest—I know it well. I will seek fruits for thee, and we will live with the birds and the flowers, and never know sorrow more.”

Tisamanes lifted up his eyes; he was helpless as a child.

“I will go anywhere with thee, my daughter. The

gods have surely pardoned my sin, since they have sent thee to me, Erotion."

As he spoke, a shadow darkened the mouth of the cave, and before them stood, stern, cold, and silent as a figure of stone, Iphigenia, the high-priestess of the temple. Not a word passed between her lips, as she looked on the father and daughter clinging to each other in mute despair. She waved her hand, and the cave was filled with the armed guards of Thoas the king. It was too late. Tisamenes was surrounded; rude hands untwined his daughter's clinging arms; he was borne away; Erotion was left lying on the floor of the cavern, cold and speechless. The servants of the temple advanced to seize her, but Iphigenia stayed them.

"Touch her not!" said the stern tones of the daughter of Agamemnon; "she is the inspired of Diana. Shall I doom to death a child because she would fain preserve a father—I, who willingly had died for mine?"

The attendants silently departed, and the high-priestess was alone with Erotion.

"Arise, my daughter," said Iphigenia, lifting the maiden up by the cold, powerless hand—"arise, and come with me."

Erotation arose, and without a sigh or tear, as passively as one of those moving, golden statues with which, as Homer sings, the artificer-god supported his steps, the maiden followed the high-priestess to the temple.

Tisamenes was doomed: no power, no prayers could save the man who had done sacrilege to the shrine of Diana. His blood must be added to that of many a guiltless stranger which had been shed in vain atonement, until fate brought the rightful victim thither. So reasoned the kingly and priestly devotees, and night and day, until the day of sacrifice came, thankful libations were poured upon the shrine, and pæans were chanted in joy that the rightful sacrifice was come. Tisamenes lay in his prison, awaiting the time, calm, if not happy. Erotion, whose wild eyes gleamed with a yet wilder inspiration, so that none dared look upon her or stay her feet: Erotion went hither and thither at her own will, flitting about like a phantom—now in the city, now at the shrine, and then in the very prison where the captive lay. Sometimes she would look upon her father with eyes of fearful calmness, and then weep over him in frantic despair, repeating the agonized cry which had first rung in the fatal cave, “My father, my father, thou shalt not die!”

At last a sudden purpose seemed to give her strength and firmness. Some days before the yearly festival of Diana, whose midnight rites were to be crowned with a human sacrifice—the death of Tisamenes—Erotion, alone and unaided, passed from the prison doors to the palace of Thoas. The barbarian king of Taurica sat among his counsellors, when he was told that a maiden craved audience. In the midst of a throng of savage men the virgin priestess passed, until she stood like a vision of light before the throne of the

king, and preferred her request—the prayer of a child for a father's life.

“King,” she cried,—all listening, for was she not the priestess Erotion, the chosen of Diana? “Remember, the very memory of the crime has passed away from earth: she who sinned was punished—oh, how sorely! and oceans of innocent blood have since then wiped out the stain. The goddess requires no more. O Thoas, be merciful!” and through the streaming hair the face of Erotion, beautiful as that of Venus herself, was lifted up to the monarch, as she knelt at the feet of the throne.

Alcinous, the son of Thoas, arose and knelt beside her.

“O king, O father, be merciful! hear the child who pleads for a father.”

Erotion turned towards the youth her lovely face in thankfulness, and again repeated, “Be merciful!” But Thoas would not hear. Then the maiden rose up from her knees; her whole countenance was changed—she was no longer the weeping girl, but the inspired priestess, who, with gleaming eyes and uplifted arms, poured forth her dreaded denunciations.

“Since thou hearest not prayers, tyrant, hear the words of one in whom the spirit of the divinity speaks. How darest thou defile the pure shrine of Diana with human blood? How darest thou make her whom the goddess saved at Aulis, the high-priestess of a rite as murderous as that to which she herself was once doomed? Hear, O king! I see in the dim future the end of all this—I see the victim saved—the shrine deserted—the sacred statue borne away—the fane dis-

honoured; and all this shall surely be seen by thine own eyes likewise, if thou dost not hearken unto me."

A dead silence pervaded the assembly. Thoas looked on the maiden whose passionate prophecies had struck terror into all hearts, and he quailed beneath her heroic gaze.

"Priestess," he said, and his tone was like a suppliant, not a king, "take off thy curse; thy father's blood shall not be on my hands. He shall depart to a far country; and may he, and such as he, never more come nigh the shrine of Diana Taurica!"

Without a word of acknowledgment, but with the air of one who had discharged a prophetic mission, Erotion glided from the presence-chamber. Many eyes followed her retreating form, so graceful in its youthful dignity; but the longest and most lingering gaze was that of the young and noble warrior, Alcinous.

CHAPTER V.

It was once again the high festival in honour of Diana Taurica. The young novices, the priestesses, even Iphigenia herself, had donned their green tunics, and were celebrating in the forest the rites of the huntress-queen. Green leaves danced, and sunbeams glimmered among the trees, through glades where Pan might have piped to the Hamadryads, or Silenus presided at the revels of the young Bacchus and the Fauns. The virgins

of the temple felt the beauty of the spot, and songs of delight rose up from the lonely wood. Erotion was among the band; but her heart was too full to sympathize with their joyous sports: she seemed weighed down by excess of happiness, and sought to be alone, to realize the blissful certainty that her father would not die.

The king had pledged his royal word that the horrible sacrifice should not take place; that at midnight the prisoner should be conveyed to the sea-shore, placed in a boat, and left to the mercy of the same ocean deities, who had wafted him to Taurica. More than this Erotion dared not implore—but she feared little the wrath of waters, compared to that terrible doom which had seemed hanging over Tisamenes. Her heart was no longer oppressed—this new and beloved tie had weaned her thoughts from those imaginings which had haunted her from childhood, causing her to be looked upon as one inspired. Earthly affections had sprung up within her young bosom; she clung to life, for the world was no more solitary; she forgot even her mysterious dream in the devotion of filial love.

Erotion quitted her companions, and wandered to a lonely and quiet dell, which no human foot save her own had ever entered: only the hind came hither with her fawns, and the nightingale broke the stillness with her music. As Erotion entered, she heard her name breathed in tones low and tender as those which wooed Ariadne on the shore of Naxos. She turned, and beside her stood a youth, so beautiful in face, so grace-

ful in form, that Apollo when keeping the flocks of Admetus was not fairer. It was Alcinous, the prince of Taurica.

Grateful tears came to the eyes of Erotion, as she remembered how he had knelt before his father's throne, and joined his prayer to hers; and then she trembled—for even to the king's son it was death to be found in the sacred wood.

“I bless thee—I will ever remember thee, gentle and noble prince,” cried Erotion; “but stay not here.”

He heard her words as understanding them not; but gazed on her as if it were a deity whom he beheld.

“Erotion—beautiful Erotion—hast thou ever seen a shadow following thy footsteps day after day, haunting thee in the temple, in the forest, to the very prison-doors,—and knewest not that it was I? Erotion, I say not that I love thee—I worship thee, I adore thee—I kneel before thee now as thou dost kneel before thy goddess. I would die for thee, and yet I dare not ask of thee one answering word—Erotion, I dare not say, ‘love me!’”

The young girl listened to these new and strange words, as if she heard them in a dream: no blush dyed her cheek, no maidenly shame bent her head.

“Why sayest thou that I love thee not?” she answered, calmly; “I love all that is good and beautiful on earth: the birds, the trees—why should I not love thee? Thou, too, didst intreat for my father, whom I love best of all.”

Alcinous looked at her, and saw that in that pure and heavenly mind there was no trace of a love like that which consumed him. He dashed himself on the ground at her feet, and cried in passionate tones—

“Erotation, this is not love like mine for thee; thou must love me—me only—as thy mother loved thy father. Thou must leave all for my sake, as I for thine—home, father, country. Oh, maiden, this is love.”

She turned on him her calm, soft eyes, and said—

“Alcinous, the love of which thou speakest, is not for me. I am a priestess—I have never felt thus. Rise, dear prince, and talk no more of such love. Do not grieve,” she continued, in sweet and compassionate tones, as Alcinous lifted from the grass his face, bedewed with burning tears. “Do not grieve—I pity thee—I love thee with the only love I can give; but I am vowed to heaven and to my father—he is saved, and I am happy.”

Again the youth burst forth impetuously—

“Erotation, dost thou believe that false oath?—Thy father *must* perish—his freedom is but a stratagem—no power can save him from death.”

The young priestess grew cold as marble, but she stood immoveable before her lover. He went on rapidly—

“Tisamenes must die—a subtle and lingering poison will be administered in the farewell cup of Chian wine; then pretended liberty will be given to him, when already bound in the iron fetters of slow but certain death.”

“Is there no hope?” said Erotion, in a tone so deadly calm, that it was terrible to hear.

“None; for the guards are sworn to see that the poison-cup has been drained before the prisoner is set free.”

A light from the setting sun illumined the face of Erotion. It became radiant with joy, until it was all but divine. Alcinous saw it not: with bowed head he pursued his vows and prayers—

“Erotion, thou wilt be left alone—thy father will die; oh, let me be thy comforter—let me teach thee to love as I love thee. Come, my beloved.”

“Not yet — not yet,” murmured Erotion, in a strangely altered voice; “the goddess must be obeyed; I see it now—I hear the mystic song—it is destiny. Yes, Alcinous, I come.”

Wild with rapturous joy, Alcinous pressed her hand to his lips, his breast, his brow, and then vanished through the trees, as the singing train of priestesses was heard approaching nearer.

When the moon had risen, and the choral hymn to Cynthia was yet pealing through the city, Erotion came to the gate of the prison where Tisamenes of Crete, now freed from the chains which had bound his limbs, waited for the blessed time of liberty. His daughter stood beside him, and kissed his hands, his robe, with a rapturous expression of joy.

“The hour is almost come, my father,” she cried, “and thou wilt be free. We shall depart hence, I and thou; far over the sea we will sail together.

Ay," she continued, "this night I shall cross it—the wild, wild sea—the desert shore—I remember all."

And then a shivering came over the maiden, and her words sank in broken murmurings.

"Thou art not afraid, my child," said Tisamenes, "not even of the gloomy ocean, when I am with thee."

"No, no," hastily cried Erotion; "I think but of thee—I am happy, most happy, O my father."

As she spoke, her eyes glanced anxiously round the prison, and rested on a goblet of carved wood, filled to the brim with Chian wine.

"I thirst, I thirst, my father," said Erotion, in low tones, as her head drooped upon his shoulder; "I have been a weary journey in the forest this day; wilt thou give me to drink?"

Tisamenes placed the cup in his daughter's hand.

"The gods have been good to us this day; it is meet we should acknowledge their benefits," she said. "O thou, whom we worship as Diana Triformis, accept the offering I bring thee now—a libation not unworthy of thee. And lifting upwards her calm eyes, Erotion poured on the floor of the dungeon a few drops from the goblet; then putting it to her lips she drained it to the dregs.

"My father, my father," she cried, throwing herself on the breast of Tisamenes, as the guard of Thoas entered. "The will of Diana is accomplished; thou art indeed saved!"

CHAPTER VI.

BENEATH the silence of the midnight moon, a boat put off from the shore of Taurica. In it were only an old man and a girl, Tisamenes of Crete and his daughter. The little vessel had scarcely spread its oary wings, when a dark figure sprang from behind a rock, and, plunging into the sea, pursued the boat. Soon from the waves that revelled around its prow, rose the head of Alcinous; his golden locks dripping with brine, and his eyes eagerly fixed where Erotion sat, silent and calm, by her father's side. Tisamenes drew the youth into the boat.

"Thou wouldst leave me, then, Erotion," Alcinous cried, passionately, "but it shall not be so. I will follow thee wherever thou goest, whether thou lovest me or not—through life, unto death."

"Be it so, Alcinous," replied the young priestess in her own low tones. She took his hand, pressed it softly in hers, and then turned again to her father.

Hour after hour the three floated over the ocean, which lay sleeping in the moonlight, nor suffered one angry wave to rise on its bosom, to bring fear or danger to the fugitives. Erotion half reclined in her father's arms, while Alcinous lay crouched at her feet, never turning his eyes from her, except to look anxiously and mournfully at Tisamenes of Crete. Erotion spoke little; was it only the moonlight that

made her countenance appear at times so deadly pale? Alcinous thought so, but the expression it wore was so divine that a feeling of awe crept over him, stilling even the passionate emotions of his love. At times he fancied the cold sea-breeze made her whole frame tremble; now and then he saw her lips quiver; she would clasp her father's hand with an agonized movement, and be calm again.

The moon sank, and the night grew dark. A heavy sleep, which Alcinous thought was the forerunner of death, fell upon Tisamenes. The youth hardly dared to breathe, lest he should bring anguish to her he loved so well. Anxiously did he watch for the first streak of dawn, and, as it appeared, a cold wandering hand touched his lips, thrilling his inmost frame.

It was too dark to see Erotion's face; but her voice sounded faint and quivering.

"Alcinous, my father sleeps; tell him all is well with me. It was I who drank of the doomed cup: I have fulfilled my destiny; he is saved!"

A light sigh, a faint movement, were all that Alcinous distinguished; the little cold hand still lay on his cheek—sealing up all horror and anguish in an awful peace. Ere long the broad sunbeam glided over the water, and rested on the sleepers; one wrapped in the calm slumber of weariness after toil; the other—ay, she lay sleeping also, but it was eternal rest.

As Alcinous looked, he saw what seemed a white

dove rise in the air. Whence it came he knew not; it hovered awhile over the vessel, then spread its dazzling wings to the sun, and departed. The youth watched it as it flew over the brightening sea, over the lovely shore to which they were safely drifting, over the blue mountains, higher and higher, until he saw it no more. Then Alcinous knew that it was the spirit of the beautiful, the self-devoted one, whom the gods had loved and taken away—that it was the soul of Erotation.

CLEOMENES THE GREEK.

A Tale of the Persecution under Dioclesian.

EVENING was darkening over the city which may well be called “eternal;” the city which has been mother, mistress, or tyrant of Europe, from the day when the blood of its twin founder was poured out upon the walls he had despised, through ages of kingdoms, commonwealths, empires, hierarchies, down to our own days. Rome it is—the same Rome, the mother of the world—but oh! how changed!

The date of our story is neither in the ancient days of republican glory, nor in the modern times of papal dignity. We now speak of the City of Seven Hills as she was in the waning days of her splendour, when the Augustan age had passed away, and had left her like a woman whose magnificent beauty is fading fast, and who seeks by meretricious adornments to hide that too evident decay, lest men should see that her glory and loveliness are fleeting together. Yet amidst all the internal wreck which had been caused by centuries of dissension between rapacious senates, savage generals,

and tyrannical or licentious emperors, the Eternal City still looked most beautiful. The politic sway of Dioclesian had restored outward tranquillity; and, save the persecuted Christians, all the subject citizens of Rome enjoyed prosperity.

We must carry our readers to the inner court of a Roman dwelling, such as the resurrection of the lava-buried cities has exposed to curious modern eyes. It was open to the clear evening sky, towards which the fountain in its centre rose to a height of many feet, giving forth a constant and thrilling melody of waters. On three sides of the court extended the domestic apartments, the fourth was bounded by a flight of marble steps, which led into a garden, from whence came perfumes of many southern flowers, where the orange shone like gold amidst its leaves, and the olives were laden with rich fruit. Birds sang in the trees, until one by one they ceased, and the nightingale was left alone to mingle her strains with the continual murmuring of the fountain.

When the dusky clouds had gathered half over the sky, and evening was insensibly melting into night, a young girl came from the house and stood alone beside the fountain. She looked anxiously towards the west, where the evening star was already bright. Her clearly defined and yet delicate features bespoke the Roman virgin; her costume, entirely of white, was such as maidens of patrician birth alone were entitled to wear; and as her veil fell from her finely-turned head, it exposed her hair knotted up behind with golden

bodkins. She looked once more at the sky, then walked quickly to the door from whence she had entered, and said in a clear but whispering tone, "Father, the star is nigh setting—it is time."

As she spoke, a man came forth, of years which showed that she who called him father must have been the child of his old age; his gray head was bare, and his erect and somewhat gaunt figure was wrapped in a toga of dark colour and homely texture. After him came two females, one bearing a lamp, whose light fell strongly on her person. She was in the prime of womanhood; every feature of her face, every glance of her proud eye, every movement of her stately form, spoke majestic and dazzling beauty. The other female seemed a Roman matron of declining years. The attire of both formed a strong contrast to the maiden who had stood by the fountain, whose garments of pure white were entirely without ornament, while theirs were many-coloured, and the arms and neck of the younger lady glittered with jewels.

The matron went timidly up to him who was apparently her husband, and said, "Irenæus, wilt thou then go, when thou knowest the danger to thee and the child?"

He turned from her and took hold of his daughter's hand. "Come, Mæsa."

Once more the wife appealed: "Irenæus, if there be danger, tell me the whole. Thy gods are not mine, but I am still thy wife, and the mother of thy child. Mæsa, tell me where thou art going with thy father?"

The young girl's lips moved, but a sign from Irenæus stayed her speech. The mother began to weep; and the stern old man seemed softened by her tears, for he went towards her and said kindly, "Domitilla mine, thou hast been ever faithful—I would trust the wife of my bosom, even though she is a worshipper of idols; but——" and he glanced toward the young female who bore the lamp.

The latter saw his look, and, casting down the light, threw both her arms into the air with wild energy, crying, "Dost thou then suspect me, O father? Is it I whom thou doubtest would betray thee,—I whom thou hast brought up these eighteen years with love and care, even as though I had been a child of thine own blood? And have I not loved thee as such, even since the day when the weeping Greek slave followed thee from the market to be cherished in thy childless home. O father, father! thou hast sorely misjudged Stratonice!"

Her tones and gestures sank from indignation into low complaining; she bowed her head, absorbed in wounded feeling.

"I do thee no wrong, Stratonice," said Irenæus, calmly; "but in these troublous times which set household against household, and parent against child, it behoves us to guard well a secret on which the life, not of one but of many, depends. It is enough for thee and Domitilla to know that I and Mæsa go this night to the solemn assembly of our brethren. Where, I must not and will not reveal. Come, my daughter."

Mæsa, who had all this time stood silent by her

father's side, kissed the hand of her mother, with the distant respect which was ever inculcated on the Roman youth, and with a gentle "Farewell, Stratonice!" she followed Irenæus as he passed down the marble steps. When the last glimmer of Mæsa's white veil disappeared among the orange trees, Domitilla and her adopted daughter returned to the house.

They passed through many apartments, whose richness showed that it was the dwelling of opulence. The gorgeous fabrics of the east, which commerce and victory had brought to Rome, were lavished on every side: the tessellated floors and the painted walls bore witness that taste had gone hand-in-hand with luxury. Only this one circumstance was remarkable, that in all the adornments there was no representation of the human figure; no groups of dancing nymphs were delineated in the compartments of the walls; there were no statues of divinities, considered partly as domestic adornments, partly as objects of worship, with which the Romans, in the decline of their empire, loved to ornament their dwellings. Save for this peculiarity, the house of Irenæus was a fit abode for a man of rank and wealth, in the times when the simplicity of ancient Rome had been succeeded by the magnificence of the emperors.

Stratonice and Domitilla came at last to their own portion of the dwelling. Here no restriction was imposed on the adornments, and here were all the outward emblems of the worship of the gods of Rome. The small statues of the household divinities occupied their accustomed shrine, before which lay incense and

garlands of flowers. From the walls looked the images of the Huntress-queen and the God of Day; Juno, the worshipped of the Roman matrons, was there pictured, and all the lesser deities of Greece and Rome. Everything that was beautiful, everything that contributed to art, religion, or female luxury, was here combined. Stratonice and her mother reclined on one of the purple couches that occupied the centre of the room, and remained long in silence, each engrossed with her own meditations. But at length Domitilla said, as if giving unconscious utterance to the train of her thoughts, "Would that Cleomenes were here! he might tell us somewhat that would allay our fears about them. Will he come, thinkest thou, Stratonice?"

The Greek maiden stooped over her embroidery, but even then she could not hide the deep flush which that name brought to her cheek, and the trembling of her voice, as she answered, "I know not, mother: wherefore should I?"

Domitilla bent over her and kissed her brow. "Thou canst not deceive me, child of my heart; as dear to me as my own Mæsa,—nay, more, for she has left her mother's faith for another new and strange. My Stratonice, I know how well thou lovest this young Greek."

"And need I blush for it, mother?" said the girl, drawing up her noble stature to its full height, while her features gleamed with enthusiasm. "Is he not noble, brave, and worthy: has he not been the light of my eyes, my guide to all that was good and beautiful, these many years? Did I not love him when I was a child,

because he spoke the tongue of my fathers, and talked to me of Greece? And need I feel shame that this love has strengthened until it has become part of my being; since in loving Cleomenes I love all that can ennoble man? Oh, mother, need I blush for this?"

"May Juno grant that he may love thee as thou lovest him!" said the mother, softly: but the words had reached to the ears of Stratonice; and her excitement passed away into dejection; her frame seemed shrinking from its proud dignity into abasement and despair.

"I said not that he loved thee not," added Domitilla, "but only——"

"Only that, perchance, not for me do his footsteps haunt the dwelling of Irenæus; that it is on the sweet young face of Mæsa that his eyes rest. Is not this what thou wouldst tell me, mother?" said Stratonice, mournfully.

"I said not so, my child," answered Domitilla. "Why should he not love thee? Thou art a fit mate for him,—the same in country, in religion: while Mæsa——"

"But she is younger and fairer than I. Hush! answer not—it is true; whatsoever he loves best *must* be the most beautiful. And yet I loved him when she was a mere child, and he, too, loved me then—or I believed so. Oh, delight of my soul! why hast thou left me?"

The mother calmed her strong excitement, until Stratonice knelt at her feet, and leaned upon her bosom, trembling like an infant, but composed.

“Even if it be as thou sayest,” said the serene voice of the wife of Irenæus, “there may still be peace for thee. Thy secret is known only to thine own heart and to thy mother’s: neither will betray thee, Stratonice. Even should Cleomenes love thee not, should he wed Mæsa——”

“I should die.”

“Not so; death comes not so easily, even after anguish deep as this. Thou art young, my daughter; thou knowest not how much we can bear and live;—I *have* known.” There was a tremulousness in the matron’s tone which made Stratonice lift up her eyes inquiringly.

Domitilla continued. “Twenty years have I been the wife of Irenæus, honoured, regarded; in many things most happy: yet thinkest thou that my husband was the love of my youth, Stratonice? I once loved even as thou; even in my age, with my gray hairs and my withered bloom, I remember him—his sweet and loving eyes,—his voice low and musical, which I hear in my heart this hour. He did love me once—I know it; there could be no falsehood in those eyes and those tones: but his love changed, as love will do sometimes, and perhaps she whom he next sought knew how to enchain him better than I.”

“But the gods punished her for that wickedness,” impetuously cried the maiden.

“Hush! Stratonice. Thou, at least, oughtest not to say such words against her, for she was the mother of Cleomenes.”

“False father, false son!” muttered Stratonice; and then throwing herself on the bosom of Domitilla, the frame of the proud and beautiful maiden shook with an agony of tears.

“Thou dost not know yet that he loves thy sister, or that she loves him,” said the mother, soothingly.

“She could not but love him if he wooed her.”

Domitilla smiled sadly. “All maidens think thus. But come, my child, we will talk no more of this; the gods may make my Stratonice happy yet.”

The mother and daughter spoke no more, but lay on the couch in silence, while the flickering lamps showed the grace of an attitude which custom and the indolence of their clime taught the Roman women. The light fell full on Stratonice, exhibiting every curve of her exquisitely modelled form, the delicate hands, the rounded arms, the white-sandalled feet; but she lay in utter abandonment of soul, and heeded not the beauty which had failed to win Cleomenes.

It was not long before he of whom her heart was full stood before Stratonice. One look at the young Greek, and who would marvel at the girl’s love? It was not that he bore in his face and form the beauty of that land whose men were heroes—whose heroes were gods; but it was an inexpressible charm in his look—in his tone, so different from all other men. A stranger, gazing on Cleomenes, or listening to his words, would have felt that he was in the presence of one who had received that spark of immortal fire—genius.

Domitilla received Cleomenes with a kindly greet-

ing. She had ever loved him; for though he bore his mother's face, he spoke with his father's voice; and woman ever remembers the tones of her first love. Stratonice gave him her white, cold hand: her cheek changed not, and her voice was firm, as she said, "Thou art welcome, Cleomenes."

How little he knew that she who looked thus calm would have laid her life down at his feet, that he might say one tender word as of old; how that the lips which uttered that cold greeting, would have cried, "Let me die—let me die content, since thou lovest me, O Cleomenes!"

But Cleomenes knew not this; his glance wandered carelessly over her magnificent beauty, for he saw it not with the eyes of love—love which makes the meanest form appear divine! He spoke courteously, friendly, to both ladies, and then looked eagerly round for a third,—who was not there.

"I met not Irenæus as I entered, noble lady Domitilla," he said, using the respectful *domina*, the favourite title of the patrician women of Rome. "And thy daughter is not with thee, I see. Are both well?"

A shade of anxiety passed over the matron's face.

"As an old and tried friend, thou knowest all the secrets of our household, Cleomenes. Therefore I dare tell thee that my husband and child are gone to their nightly worship."

"At this hour, an old man and a girl, to be unprotected in the streets of Rome!" cried Cleomenes. "Lady, it was madness! The city is full of revelling

in honour of the victory of Gallienus, and the very name of Christian is a mock and a byeword. They will be discovered."

"The gods forbid!" shrieked the mother; but Stratonice did not utter a sound.

"And Mæsa wore the white garments of her vow, while all the Roman women flaunt in crimson and gold! It will betray at once that she is a Christian," muttered the young man, turning deadly pale; but he saw the mother's agonized and imploring look, and said no more, except to ask the place where Irenæus and his daughter had gone.

"I know not: he would not say!" moaned Domitilla. "Alas! it is a fearful thing to be wedded to a Christian!"

"Do not say so," Cleomenes answered, for her words struck like ice into his own conscious heart. "But I cannot stay here: I must go in search of them. Be comforted, lady; I will die rather than any harm should come to Mæsa." And in a moment he was gone.

Stratonice followed him with her eyes, and then turned them on Domitilla, who, amidst all her maternal grief, was struck with their expression of utter despair.

"Mother," the girl said, in accents terribly calm, "canst thou doubt whom Cleomenes loves *now*?"

II. *

IN one of the most secret windings of the catacombs which extended under the capital—another city of the dead beneath that of the living—was gathered a little band of worshippers, the persecuted Christians of Rome. Among them were all ranks, all ages, from the noble patrician lady, who would not so much as have ventured her jewelled sandal across the common street, down to the blind and aged beggar, who existed, rather than could be said to live. Young and old, patrician and plebeian, rich and poor, mingled their voices in the psalm, knelt together, and broke the mystic bread of universal love and brotherly union. Around them lay the bones of the departed—a mute warning that all must one day become equal in the same poor dust. In the dead of night from that gloomy house of tombs rose up the voice of prayer and of thanksgiving. Many lifted their voices from beside the very niches that hid their dead kindred from their sight, knowing not but that ere morning they themselves might find a grave in the same sepulchre. How earnest, how solemn must have been worship such as this!

Among the assemblage were Irenæus and his daughter.

* It is with a pleasant remembrance that the author acknowledges having taken the idea of this scene, and perhaps unconsciously of the whole story, from Mr. F. R. Pickersgill's picture of "Christian Worship in the Catacombs."

When the service of the Sabbath vespers had been concluded, the priest, an aged man, who looked as though he had received his holy message from the very lips of the Apostles, stood forth. His words were few and simple; there was no eloquence on his lips; he spoke like an earnest man to earnest hearers, unto whom every syllable was a question of life or death. Afterwards others addressed their brethren; among the rest Irenæus. Finally, the rites of the church—which could only be thus secretly administered,—were performed. Babes, whose fathers had confessed their faith through fire and sword and the jaws of wild beasts, were brought by their widowed mothers to be sealed in the same holy communion. The aged, the sick, to whom this night might be their last open confession of faith, received the prayers and consolations of religion; and then there came the strangest rite of all in that gloomy temple—a marriage.

The bride was young and gentle-looking; the husband a tall and sturdy Roman, hard-handed, rough-visaged, and yet not devoid of the soft expression given by sincere piety and tender human love. It was strange to hear those vows given and received at such a time, and in such a place; to see love triumphing over danger, persecution, and death. When the rite was ended, the priest addressed the newly-wedded pair.

“My children, there are those amongst us who might say I did evil in this holy solemnization—that at all times, and especially in this season of trouble,

ye would serve God best asunder. But I say not so—I dare not. Be blessed, and keep your holy vow until death—how far or how near that death may be, God knoweth. Rufinus, thy father, who gained the martyr's crown when thou wert yet a child, lies beneath thy feet; break not the vow made over his sacred dust. And thou, Metella, who art one with thy husband in all things—above all, in the same holy faith—be thankful that in life and in eternity ye will never be parted. Alas! for those amongst us who are bound to unbelievers by the hallowed tie of marriage, which is yet too sacred to be loosed; but woe unto those who, being free, willingly unite themselves to idolaters! Pain, affliction, and remorse, shall be their portion in this life, and eternal wrath hereafter!”

“Amen—amen!” cried the deep voice of Irenæus, breaking the awe-struck silence which followed the preacher's vehement words. Mæsa hid her face in her veil, and as she knelt, her frame bent down almost to the earth, a visible shudder passed over her. But no one heeded: all were too much absorbed in their own feelings. After a solemn blessing the bridegroom took his bride, and all knelt down for the parting prayer.

Suddenly the watchers, who stood at a little distance guarding the descent to the tomb, saw a shadow gliding along the damp wall. Lower and lower, nearer and nearer, came the dreadful spectre, enough to strike superstitious terror in that place of death. But the Christians had no fear, save of the living. One of the

watchers, a blind man, remarkable for quickness of hearing, started from his seat, and said, in a hurried whisper—

“My brethren, death is upon us. I hear footsteps, and the clank of arms.”

In another moment the soldiers of Dioclesian had burst on the yet-kneeling worshippers, and the low murmur of prayer was succeeded by shrieks, groans, and curses. All was confusion and despair. Some died in the struggle with the soldiers, few by their weapons; for it was the will of the persecutors that the Christians should perish not in a hand-to-hand fight, but by the tortures of slow martyrdom. The torches were nearly all extinguished in the strife: and death seemed to many more fearful, since it came in darkness. Some, seeing in the gloom their only hope of safety, and knowing the windings of the catacombs, stole through the very midst of the assailants toward the entrance. Among these were the bridegroom and bride—

Irenæus neither strove to fight or escape: he stood where he had knelt, unnoticed by the soldiers, his figure being hidden by the darkness; his daughter, paralyzed and insensible with terror, lying like an infant in his powerful arms. At last a touch, too gentle to be that of an enemy, and yet firm, was laid on his shoulder, and a whisper reached his ear.

“Irenæus, if thou wouldst be saved, come!”

At this instant a Roman soldier advanced to seize him; but the same voice, in a loud and commanding

tone, which roused even Mæsa from her stupor, and caused her to utter a cry, said,—

“These are my prisoners—release them!”

The soldier muttered some apology, and departed.

“Give me thy burden, Irenæus, and come,” added the first speaker, and then even Irenæus recognized the voice of Cleomenes the Greek.

He took Mæsa from her father’s arms, and led both, as seeming captives, to the foot of the staircase. Hardly had they reached it, when a struggle was heard above, a woman’s shriek, and a fall. Immediately, at their very feet, lay the bruised and mangled forms of two unfortunates who had been cast down the winding staircase. Even in the last struggle and fall their arms had not untwined from round each other. Irenæus looked upon the dead bodies; they were Rufinus and Metella, the bridegroom and the bride.

Past the struggling, the captives, the dead, Cleomenes and Irenæus went,—the Greek still bearing Mæsa, as if she were his prisoner,—through long passages, where they had to grope their uncertain way, sometimes displacing the ghastly inhabitants of that city of the dead; on, through all that was fearful and horrible, to the blessed upper air. It was just daybreak when they emerged from the catacombs. The city was still in darkness, save that the faint light of dawn rested on the Palatine Hill. The cool morning air restored consciousness to Mæsa, and Cleomenes relinquished his burden, but still supported her feeble steps; the old man following. Thus, almost without a word, they

passed through the deserted city, in which the revels of the night had at last ceased, but still had left traces in the broken boughs and wine-drenched garlands which strewed the streets. Here and there, they passed by a few sleeping revellers, who lay in the open air in helpless stupor. Save these, the only occupants of the highway seemed the terminal statues of the Roman divinities, which were placed in the corners of streets, hung with the now withered wreaths with which they had been adorned. Such sights always made the stern zealot, Irenæus, turn away his eyes, and draw his garments closer about him, lest he should be polluted by a passing touch of the hated idol.

They quitted the city, came through the cool and lovely valley of Egeria to the Ostian road, and soon approached the dwelling of Irenæus. There the old man paused, took his daughter from her young protector, and said,—

“We must now part, Cleomenes. I know not if I ought to thank thee for saving my own poor life,—a life I would gladly exchange for the glory of a martyr’s death; but I am a father, and I do thank thee for preserving this child. Farewell, Cleomenes! Thou art not one of us. May the true God one day guide thee to better things!”

Irenæus lifted up his eyes in silent devotion; while Mæsa laid her hand on that of Cleomenes, and said gently—

“My father speaks coldly; but his gratitude is as

warm as mine. And I shall ever remember all that Cleomenes risked to save the life of Mæsa."

"Because that life is ten thousand times more precious than his own to Cleomenes," answered the Greek, in a low tone which made the girl shrink from his eye, and take her hand from the warm clasp of his, with a hurried farewell. But after he was gone, she looked after him long and fixedly, and a tear gathered in her soft eyes. Her father turned, and saw it.

"Mæsa," he said, and the stern severity of his tone struck her with terror, "the daughter of Irenæus must waste no tears upon an idolator. Remember the words which this night followed the union of those who, though now dead, are most happy. Thou heardest the curse,—beware!"

And Irenæus led his daughter onward, and entered his own house.

III.

AFTER the fatal night which had witnessed the discovery of their secret worship, many of the Christians of Rome sealed their faith with their blood. Such was the thirst for the glory of martyrdom that prevailed among the primitive converts, that some voluntarily devoted themselves to death by an open confession of their faith, or by offering sacrilege to the shrines of the deities. The luxurious inhabitants of Rome cared not whether it was their Christian fellow-citizens, or the barbarian cap-

tives of Gallienus, who made sport for them at the arena, so that they had no lack of their brutal amusements. Sometimes the flame of persecution waxed fainter for a while, and then some new cause lit it up afresh, and thousands perished.

Amidst all these horrors, the house of Irenæus went unscathed. The known piety of his wife Domitilla to the gods of Rome,—her noble birth, and his own, protected him, if not from the taint of suspicion, at least from its fatal consequences. Sometimes, in his fiery zeal, Irenæus would have sought that persecution from which he seemed secure, had not his love for the child who shared his religion prevented the outbreak of such wild devoteeism.

From the time of that dread night in the catacombs, a shadow seemed to come over the young girl's spirit. The presence of Cleomenes always brought to her a strange agitation. At his sight her colour would come and go, her lips tremble, and her eyes fill with tears. Her mother thought and said how that it was no marvel the child should shudder at aught that reminded her of that horrible scene; but Stratonice watched Mæsa's every look with doubt and suspicion. Her father, too, rarely suffered her out of his presence; and, though Cleomenes haunted both openly and secretly the abode which contained her he loved, he found no chance ever to utter more than those few words, which, though a torture, and, as she deemed, a heinous sin, yet rung in Mæsa's ears evermore, and were drunk in by her like sweet but deadly poison.

It was rarely that the daughter of Irenæus quitted her home; and now, in her failing health and harassed mind, she only sought to be alone. At the close of day she sometimes walked with Stratonice among the orange-trees of the garden, until the hour approached when Cleomenes was wont to come. Then the elder sister would depart to enjoy the happiness of being near him whom she so passionately loved; while Mæsa strove to turn her thoughts from such vain and sinful dreams to the duties and aspirations of her religion. But, even amidst her evening prayer, and her vesper hymn, often came the vision of Cleomenes, and she would weep that such sweet memories could be a crime.

One evening, Stratonice, wearied of waiting for the so-longed-for step, cast aside her embroidery, and again went out into the orange-garden. She did not seek her sister; her own soul was too full of pain and jealousy. It was torture to be near that fair and innocent girl, to look upon the face that Cleomenes loved, to see that beauty and sweetness which she knew so precious to him. At times, by a strange revulsion of feeling, Stratonice would feel how impossible it was to hate aught that *he* loved, and would almost terrify her sister by sudden and passionate caresses. But then again came that horrible jealousy which gnawed into her very heart, and Stratonice would have fled anywhere to avoid the sight of Mæsa.

She hurried into the darkest and gloomiest shades; she would have shut out the very stars from her sight. Thus she came unconsciously to a spot fraught with

many memories. It was a little mossy nook, from which welled forth a spring of water no larger than a silver thread which a naiad's hand had drawn through the green grass. There many a time, in their early youth, had she and Cleomenes sat together, and he had taught the orphan the tongue of her fatherland, talked to her of their beloved Corinth, of Athens the glorious, of the old warriors and sages; recited the sounding verses of Homer, and the thrilling lyrics of Sappho, until the enthusiastic maiden could have become a heroine to fight by the side of him who spoke, or could have died joyfully, had it been for the love of Cleomenes. Here, too, in the terror of a wound from one of those dangerous snakes which are not uncommon in Italian woods, the girl had once flung her arms round the neck of her young lover, and been soothed by him with tender words,—ay, and with kisses.

As Stratonice thought of all this, memory became agony; she would have fled away, but that she heard a low murmur of voices near the spring, and saw the flutter of a white robe. She came nearer—despair made her step firm and noiseless—she looked through the trees. There, in the clear starlight, she saw Mæsa's drooping form, and beside her, bending over her with unutterable fondness, stood Cleomenes. His arms were wreathed round her, her hands were clasped in both his, and even though Mæsa wept, she did not take them away.

Stratonice could have shrieked, but that a suffocating weight oppressed her—it passed away, and she seemed

frozen into marble. Yet to her ears every word that Cleomenes said came terribly distinct, and she felt forced to listen.

“I have told thee all, my best beloved,” he said, with an accent of inexpressible sweetness and tenderness, “and thou scornest me not. Oh, Mæsa! thou must—thou dost love me.”

“I dare not, Cleomenes—I dare not,” faintly answered the girl. “It would be a sin against my father—and more, against my God! I dare not love thee—I cannot. Take away thine arms, and let me go.”

He freed her in a moment, and stood leaning against a tree; he looked at her for a while with an expression so mournful—so despairing—that it went to her very heart.

“I have deceived myself—thou lovest me not,” he said at last. “I will go away and die.”

“Thou shalt not go,” cried Mæsa passionately—“thou shalt not go; for I love thee—I do love thee, my Cleomenes!”

And Stratonice, from her hiding-place, witnessed the first embrace of confessed and mutual love between her sister and the beloved of her own heart—her idol for years. She clasped her hands over her brow till they felt like bands of iron, then pressed them together until the red drops seemed ready to ooze from the slender fingers; and without a word or cry, she sank down, still conscious, but utterly powerless, on the grass.

In that moment every womanly feeling, every loving and kindly emotion, fled from the bosom of Stratonice. No wounded pride for slighted love—no bleeding vanity—no girlish sorrow over withered hopes, brought relieving tears to her eyes. They were burning; but she could not weep. Desperation—wild hatred—maddening revenge, came like serpents hissing around her, and all whispered one and the same word. Could any but the countless starry eyes have beheld her then, as she stood, most terrible in her magnificent beauty, they would have likened her to the glorious but fallen archangel who defied the Eternal.

IV.

THE Furies which tortured the crime-stained son of Agamemnon, were not more terrible than the thoughts which now crowded on the soul of Stratonice. First, they were wild, desperate—too horrible to have any real form—then they shaped themselves into a stern determination, which grew firmer and firmer the more it lingered in her heart. All feelings of gratitude for years of tender care—all sisterly and filial emotions—were swallowed up in the whirlpool of frenzied love. During the long and fearful hours of night the long-suppressed passions of her clime rose up and rioted uncontrolled, and all resolved themselves into the one certainty that, in whatever way, Cleomenes must be parted from Mæsa.

At the dawn of day, long ere the indolent and luxurious Roman ladies had unclosed their eyes, Stratonice disguised herself in the attire of one of her slaves, and went forth to betray those for whom she would once have died. As the morning breeze passed her by, laying its cool kiss on her hair and brow, and the faint twitter of the waking birds was heard from the wood of Egeria—whose very name brought images of holiness and peace—the contrast to her own tumultuous passions struck forcibly on the throbbing heart of Stratonice; the horrible phantoms fled away before the calm reality of light and day, and a vague feeling of remorse and pity for the innocence she was about to betray stole over her. But then came the agonizing memory of Cleomenes and his love—and the girl pressed her hands wildly to her heart as if to drive thence every feeling but that all-engrossing one which led her on to the deed.

Again and again she kept repeating to herself that it would not bring death to that sweet child; for the patrician Christians, if only suspected, were now generally allowed time, after the first warning, to flee from the threatened persecution. Thus Mæsa would be parted from her lover without the sin of murder. With these words, Stratonice moved rapidly forward, and ere the madness which goaded her had passed away, she had denounced Mæsa, the daughter of Iræneus, as a concealed Christian.

Flying from the house of the prætor with the speed of one who is pursued by a spectre, the Greek girl

reached her home. Fear lest she should be suspected, a vague apprehension as to the result of her deed, and a lingering remorse which grew stronger and stronger now that it was utterly in vain, oppressed her by turns. With the swiftness of an antelope she gained the secret entrance of the garden, and soon reached the house in safety and undiscovered. There, in her own chamber, Stratonice felt all her strength depart; she cast away the thick mantle which had disguised her, and threw herself on the floor, laying her burning brow on the marble to give relief to its throbbings, and trembling at every sound.

Then, by a sudden impulse, she passed to the chamber next her own, which was her sister's. Mæsa lay in a slumber which might once have been disturbed, for the dark eyelashes were still heavy with tears. But it was all calmness now, and a sweet happy smile wandered round the child-like mouth. Broken words came at times from the lips of the dreaming girl. Stratonice bent down to listen, and distinguished that name which lay ever like a silent melody in her own heart—the name of Cleomenes!

She rushed from the couch, and, casting her arms with frenzied exultation in the air, while her disordered tresses and flashing eyes gave her the appearance of a Mænad or a Pythoness, Stratonice thanked the gods who had strengthened her for the deed she had done.

That night, when Irenæus, under the influence of gentle and domestic feelings to which the austere zealot seldom gave way, had gathered his wife and

daughters round him—that night the awful warning came. A message from the prætor intimated that the daughter of Irenæus would be required to prove her faith, by worshipping publicly the gods of Rome.

For a moment the young maiden trembled under the terrible blow: she uttered a shriek, and threw herself into her father's arms.

“Hush! I am with thee,” murmured Irenæus. Then turning to the bearer of the secret summons, he said, firmly, though drops of agony stood on the father's brow, “Thou seest she neither confesses nor denies the charge until the appointed time. Go!”

By degrees firmness and strength came to the young Christian maiden; she stood upright, and folded her small hands on her bosom, saying—

“Father, doubt me not: I have no fear now.”

Domitilla flung herself at the feet of her husband.

“Oh! Irenæus, save thyself and her—there is time. Fly, I beseech thee, this night—this very hour.”

Irenæus looked at his daughter; she returned the gaze with eyes in which shone resolution equal to his own, and put her hand in his.

“Mother,” she said in low and serene tones, “the daughter of Irenæus may not fly. I am weak, but the holy faith I follow will make me strong. I will cling to it and acknowledge it even unto death.”

A glow of rapturous exultation lighted up the face of Irenæus.

“Domitilla, Stratonice—worshippers of false gods,”

he cried, "see what it is to be a Christian. My child," continued the old man, "do as thou wilt; I forbid thee not—I glory in thee. Rather than that thou shouldst deny thy faith, I would see thee die a martyr's death. Fear not, Mæsa, my beloved, for such a death is most blessed. Let us go and pray that thou mayest have strength to meet it."

And without another word he led his daughter away.

Thus did the early fathers of the faith show a resolution so heroic and so constant, that martyrdom was esteemed a glory—a thing to be desired rather than dreaded. And thus did their devotion to their holy religion triumph over every other human feeling, making the timorous firm, and the feeble strong; giving to delicate woman the courage of manhood, and endowing manhood with a heroism and endurance almost superhuman. In our days we can sit by our peaceful firesides and read how the early Christians died—nay, more, joyfully surrendered their best beloved to death without a tear; and it seems like an idle tradition—an amusing and incredible tale. May the fearful realities of such times never come nearer to us than now!

V.

THE Forum of Rome was appointed as the place of assembly where, week by week, the suspected or acknowledged Christians were accused and condemned. It was a noble and spacious hall, adorned with all the

magnificence of the time. The days had gone by when the rulers of republican Rome, severe in their simplicity, sent forth their judgments from beside the warrior's tent and the farmer's plough. Even the sway of Dioclesian, who gave no countenance to luxury, failed to restrict the unbounded love of splendour which was the destruction of Rome. How would the ghosts of those stern old Romans have looked with disgust and contempt on their ancient Forum thronged with statues, not of heroes, but of crime-laden and effeminate emperors, whom they would have deemed too abject to wield a woman's distaff—too vile to crawl under the loathed garments of a slave!

On the gorgeous seats which occupied the place of the ancient rostra, reclined the judges,—men whose splendid garments and careless attitudes made them seem more like guests at a feast, than senators whose fiat was to be that of life or death. Before them stood the Christians, a band as various in age, sex, and station, as that which had met at the catacombs. One by one they were called upon to answer the accusation—or deny their faith by casting incense on the altar of Janus, whose temple was within the precincts of the Forum. One by one did those simple and faithful followers of the apostles go to their trial and their doom; some pouring forth anathemas on the idol and its worshippers, thereby attaining more quickly the longed-for death; others, in calm endurance, uttering no words of anger or reproach, but meekly and silently meeting their doom.

“Mæsa, daughter of Irenæus, stand forth!” cried the cold, stern voice of Galerius, the second in the empire, a harsh and merciless judge.

The young maiden glided from her father’s side, and stood before the tribunal still covered with her veil. The judge motioned her to take it off, and the pale sweet face of the daughter of Irenæus was revealed to his rude eyes.

“Poor child! thou art young to die thus,” said a compassionate voice; it came from him who sat next to Galerius, a man of middle age, whose mild features and fair hair contrasted strongly with the dark-looking, cruel-eyed judge.

“Thou wert always soft-hearted, Constantius Chlorus,” answered Galerius, with a sneer. “But the will of the Emperor must be done, nevertheless. Fair damsel, I would not be harsh; the altar is near thee, throw on it but a few grains of incense, and thou art free. Surely the task is easy.”

But Mæsa stood immovable.

“Give her the censer!” cried Galerius. “Come, maiden, wilt thou do this?”

“I will not,” came from the girl’s lips in a tone most sweet, and yet most firm. “I am a Christian.”

One deep sigh, as of agonized suspense, was heard from the midst of the Christian band, and from the multitude beyond rose a half-suppressed shriek,—they came from the father and mother of the doomed Mæsa.

“Fool!” said the judge. “Who taught thee to believe such madness?”

“I did,” cried Irenæus, stepping forth beside Mæsa. “I am the Christian father of this Christian child. I was Irenæus, the soldier of Probus, the victor of the Sarmatians, the honoured of the senate; now I am a martyr for the faith of Jesus Christ, ready to die with this my devoted and dutiful child.”

The gentle countenance of Constantius was full of pain.

“Noble Irenæus,” he said, “we will not listen to thee—our ears are deaf. Go away to thy house; let one suffice for the sacrifice.”

But Galerius, full of savage pleasure, ordered his guards to lead the new criminal to the altar of incense. To the surprise of all, Irenæus walked unresistingly thither, and stood before the statue of Janus. Then he cried with a loud voice—

“Cursed idol! worshipped blindly by the votaries of a cursed faith, thus does the servant of the one true God execute vengeance upon thee!”

And with a blow from that aged but once-powerful arm, which had crushed the enemies of Rome like so many grasshoppers, Irenæus dashed the statue from its pedestal. It fell, broken in a thousand pieces, on the temple floor.

A cry of horror, of revenge, of exultation, burst from the Romans and the Christians. All was confusion in the assembly; and Irenæus would have been torn in pieces by the indignant multitude, had not

Galerius commanded the guards to secure and protect him. Thus the old man was borne away, and Mæsa stood in the midst of the Forum, alone and unprotected.

Not unprotected; for suddenly a young man leaped from the crowd, and stood by the maiden's side. It was Cleomenes. Even in that dread time a gleam of joy came over Mæsa's countenance at the faithfulness of him she loved; but in a moment she whispered mournfully—

“Cleomenes, why art thou here?—must I bring death on thee, too?”

He did not answer her, but turned to the younger of the judges.

“O Constantius! I appeal to thee for the sake of this young maiden. How can she be guilty, even if she have been compelled to conform to her father's faith? Noble Chlorus, thou hast known me from my youth: here I pray thee to grant me this maiden's life. Romans,” he cried, turning to the multitude, “let the daughter of the condemned Irenæus be forgotten in the wife of Cleomenes the Greek.”

At this name a cry of pleasure rose up from the crowd. “He is a good man; let him take the girl. Long live Cleomenes the Greek!” were severally heard from the changeable populace.

“Let her cast the incense—but one grain—and she is free,” said the judges.

Cleomenes led Mæsa to the shrine; he placed the censer in her hand; he stood before her with his sweet,

loving, and beseeching eyes. The daughter of Irenæus looked at him, pressed his hands to her lips and bosom, then let them go, and said—

“For thee—for thee, most faithful and beloved one, I would renounce all on earth; but I cannot deny my God!”

She dropped the censer on the ground, folded her hands calmly on her breast, and said once more,—

“I am a Christian. Let me die with my father.”

CHAPTER III.

AND where, amidst all this, was the betrayer, the woman whose love was worse than hate—the unsuspected guilty one, whose self-tortures were ten thousand times fiercer than a martyr’s flames—where was Stratonice?

Wandering about like an unquiet spirit—in the desolate home—in the crowded Forum—in the prison, where the condemned ones awaited a slow-coming death, to grace the next festival of the Roman murderers—beside the father, who, though firm in his own enthusiastic faith, yet cursed the unknown wretch who had betrayed his child—by the frantic mother, who upbraided her adopted daughter for that ill-fated love which seemed now about to be made fortunate by the coming death of her own innocent child—by the lover, whose passionate devotion, no longer concealed, was as an

ever-pointed dagger in that jealous heart. Thus lived Stratonice!

Most terrible was it to bear within her the burning fire of an evil conscience,—to meet kind looks and words from those she had so deeply injured, trembling every hour lest some unforeseen chance should reveal the truth, and lay the curse of the bereaved on the double murderess. But worse than all, to be a daily witness of the strong and despairing love—the almost adoring reverence with which Cleomenes watched Mæsa, while she herself, who had perilled her soul to gain that love, was utterly forgotten. In the prospect of coming death the stern bar of severance between Pagan and Christian was removed; and, though Irenæus oftentimes reprov'd his daughter for the indulgence of feelings which he considered unworthy of a Christian, and unfitting one who was about to enter on the glories of martyrdom, yet he did not forbid the young Greek's coming daily to the prison. The known adherence of Cleomenes to his own religion, his high character, and the esteem in which he was held by Constantius Chlorus, procured him this favour, and enabled him in many things to alleviate the condition of the captives during the weary time that, with a refinement of cruelty, was frequently suffered to elapse between the condemnation and death of the Christians.

And thus, within those gloomy walls, the young lovers met. This bitter sorrow—this impending fate—but drew their hearts nearer together. A holy calmness took the place of maidenly timidity in the bosom

of Mæsa: it was surely not sin to love Cleomenes now. Hour after hour she suffered him to sit at her feet, and look into her eyes, until the past seemed all blotted out, and the horrible future grew dim in the distance, as though it could not be that such love would be swallowed up in death.

Now and then Mæsa spoke to him of her faith, of the blessed hopes which sustained her; and, though Cleomenes answered not, it seemed to her as if she must go on, that, perchance, when her lips were silent for ever, some once-uttered words might come back to his memory, and the wise and noble Greek philosopher might be guided on that heavenly road by the simple teaching of an unlearned girl, whose love was her only wisdom. Amidst such thoughts death seemed less like an eternal parting between the two, who, though so different in all else, were yet firmly united in the one mysterious bond of love.

At times they talked as if there had been no sorrow in the world—no cloud hanging over them; they spoke of old days of peace and happiness, and Mæsa played with the birds and flowers which her lover took care to bring to the prison: listened to their warblings as she placed them in the small beam of sunshine that crept through the interstices of the massive walls; sometimes, in childlike forgetfulness of trouble, giving vent to her own low musical laugh. How strange it sounded in such a scene!

Then a mournful look would stray over her face, and she would sigh to leave the beautiful world, made still

more beautiful by love, until Cleomenes would snatch her to his bosom—even her father did not say him nay at such a time—and declare with wild energy that no power should take her from him—that his heart's beloved should not die!

All this the tortured eyes of Stratonice beheld, and she knew that her sin was all in vain, for that nought but death could separate love from love.

At last, through the astonished city spread the news of the abdication of Dioclesian, and the appointment of Galerius to the sole power of the Western Empire. Fearful, indeed, was this intelligence to the Christians of Rome, for they knew that the rejoicings on account of the new emperor were the signal for the death of their condemned brethren; and, hardest to bear of all, was the suspense in which the prisoners were kept, each one knowing not the day or hour when he might be led to the place of crucifixion, or to the circus, to make sport for the high-born men and fair women of Rome with his dying agonies, in the struggle with wild beasts.

It was from the lips of his wife that Irenæus first heard the tidings of his coming fate. Distracted with terror, Domitilla rushed through the streets of Rome to the prison where her husband and child lay. Ever and anon the shouts from the Colosseum rose upon the air, telling that the sports were already begun. She entered the prison: even its terrible stillness was a blessing after those death-laden acclamations.

Mæsa sat at her father's feet; on her lap the parch-

ment which contained the precious words of comfort,—a treasure so zealously guarded by the early Christians, that torture itself often failed to extort from them the place where it was concealed. The young girl looked so content, so calm, so full of life, youth, and loveliness, that at the sight a wild shriek burst from the mother, and she fell senseless on the floor. Irenæus, with a gentleness unusual to him, raised his wife in his arms, and looked inquiringly at Stratonice, who followed.

“Father,” she said, slowly and distinctly, though her lips were pale as death, and her wild eyes glared with a strange light — “father, the games at the circus have begun.”

“Is it even so!” answered Irenæus; “then the time has come. Mæsa, my beloved, dost thou hear?”

She had buried her face in the white veil which she still wore, but, at his voice, she leaped up and clung round her father’s neck, not weeping, but as pale and cold as a marble statue.

“Is death still so terrible to thee, poor child?” said Irenæus, softly. “Nay, fear not, Mæsa; thy father’s God and thine will give thee strength when it comes. Have any of my brethren yet suffered, Stratonice?” he continued, with entire composure.

“I met them leading Leontius, and Balbus with his wife Placina; and from the arena was carried the white-haired priest who stood beside thee at the Forum—at least his——”

Stratonice could not finish the sentence, for a con-

vulsive shudder came over her. But not a muscle quivered in the grave countenance of the aged Christian.

“They delay till the last before they send for Irenæus the centurion,” he said, with a fearless smile; “they think these aged limbs will furnish fine sport for the Hyrcanian tigers, but I fear not, Stratonice. Take thy mother,” he added, in softened tones; “she will soon have none but thee.”

But Stratonice dashed herself on the floor at his feet and cried, in tones that rang through the prison with the shrillness of remorse and despair—

“Father—father, kill me with thy curses, but speak not so gently. I—only I—have done this. I have betrayed my sister—I have murdered thee. Oh! Irenæus—I dare not call thee father—spurn me—slay me—let me die at thy feet.”

Irenæus took his robe from her grasp, and turned from her as from a noisome reptile. But Mæsa looked on her sister, and in that look there was neither anger nor disgust, but sorrow and compassion. And truly, it was pitiful to see that proud head bowed to the very dust—that long beautiful hair torn and scattered in fragments with the vehemence of her agony.

“Stratonice,” said Mæsa, “I ever loved thee—I never did thee evil, my sister. Why hast thou done this?”

“Because thou didst take from me the joy of my heart—my only blessing in this world; because that cruel beauty of thine stole Cleomenes from me. And I

loved him—ay, ten thousand times more than thou! Thou, who wouldst not throw a grain of incense to save thyself and bless him, while I have sacrificed father, mother, sister—yea, my own soul, for the love of Cleomenes! Whose love is greatest, thine or mine?”

Mæsa shrunk trembling from the vehement words and gestures, which roused Domitilla from her swoon. But the enfeebled mind of the wife of Irenæus could not clearly comprehend what was passing; she drew her child to her arms, and sat patiently smoothing Mæsa's soft hair, and looking in her face, in a state of dreamy unconsciousness which was indeed bliss.

Meanwhile the stern voice of Irenæus addressed the prostrate Stratonice—

“Woman! rise up.”

The haughty spirit of the Greek girl was subdued at his tone; she arose and stood before him, humbly and silently as a child.

“Had I been of like faith to thee, wretched one,” said Irenæus, “I should have cursed thee: but the Christians do not so. It ill becomes one who is passing into the presence of the All-merciful to return evil for evil. Therefore, thine own conscience be thy sole torment!”

At this moment, even through the dense walls of the dungeon, penetrated the shouts of the multitude. When the sound fell on the ears of Stratonice, it seemed to rouse her almost to frenzy.

“Oh! father — sister — pardon!” she shrieked.

“Leave me not with your blood upon my head. Pardon—pardon !”

“I do pardon thee, poor unfortunate,” answered Irenæus. “The deed has given to her and to me a glorious crown, while thou thyself hast lost all.”

Mæsa bent over her sister, and laid on her brow the kiss of peace.

“I too pardon thee, Stratonice,” she said. “I shall soon pain thee no longer ; his love was very sweet to me,” and the young girl’s voice trembled ; “but when I have gone away there will be none to part thee from Cleomenes.”

“And now trouble us no more—thou whom I have so long called daughter,” said Irenæus. “Leave us to prepare for the death thou hast caused.”

He drew Mæsa from her ; Stratonice shrunk away, and crouched down in the farthest corner of the dark cell. Irenæus and his daughter sat together, and awaited in silence and calmness the fatal summons.

Louder and louder grew the shouts of the multitude—it seemed as if they came nearer and nearer, until they reached the prison itself. Suddenly the doors were flung open, and, at the threshold, stood, not the officer who bore the signal of death, but the noble and beloved form of Cleomenes the Greek, his countenance gleaming with joy, his bright hair flung back, his right hand waving aloft a parchment.

It was the celebrated Edict of Galerius : the Christians were saved.

By a sudden determination of policy, rather than an impulse of mercy, the new emperor had issued a general pardon to his Christian subjects, with permission to exercise their religion in peace.

Wildly from that murky cell rose up the cry of joy and deliverance—the prayer of thanksgiving. The wife clung to her husband—all difference of faith forgotten; tears—even tears—bedewed the iron cheeks of Irenæus as he clasped his daughter to his bosom, and knew that the shadow of death no longer gathered over them, while Cleomenes knelt beside Mæsa, kissing her hands, her garments, with delirious joy.

And there in the darkness—afar from all—crouched Stratonice, not daring to approach their happiness—glaring upon them with starting eyes and burning brain, one moment wild with rapture at their deliverance and her own freedom from the sin of murder, and then stung to madness by the loving words and joyful looks which Cleomenes lavished on his Mæsa.

At last Irenæus turned to the young Greek, and the tenderness of the happy father became merged in the sternness of the Christian zealot. He drew Mæsa from her lover and said—

“The blessings of those whom thou hast once saved, and to whom thou hast this day been a joyful messenger of deliverance, be upon thee, Cleomenes! but thou must leave us now for ever. I dare not brave the wrath of the Christians’ God by giving my daughter to an idolater.”

From her dark hiding-place, Stratonice started to her feet, and her eyes were fixed on the countenance of him she loved so madly. But no struggle of disappointed hope darkened the face of the young Greek. Cleomenes knelt before Irenæus, and took his hand, saying—

“Father—even so! Give me my heart’s beloved; for Mæsa’s God is mine—I have become a Christian.”

A cry so wild—so despairing—that it might have been the shriek of a parting soul, burst from the lips of Stratonice, and, ere the lover could embrace his betrothed, she stood between them.

“Mæsa,” she said, in a hoarse whisper, “hadst thou died this day I would have died too. Thou art saved—thou art happy—therefore, also, I will die.” She drew a short Greek dagger from her robe, and plunged it into her bosom.

Life parted—not suddenly but lingeringly. Stratonice lay with her head pillowed on the breast of her adopted mother; with ebbing life all frenzy passed away. Only still her dim eyes wandered to the face of Cleomenes with mournful tenderness.

“Forgive me,” she murmured: “thou art happy, Cleomenes, and I die; forgive me for my love’s sake.”

Mæsa bent over the dying girl, and laid a crucifix on her bosom; but the feeble hand of Stratonice cast it aside with scorn. She lifted herself up with wonderful energy, raised her arms in the air, and cried—

“Gods of Greece—gods of my country—I have lived

faithful to your forsaken shrines, and faithful I will die. Life has been a torture to me; may I find peace in the land of the dead! Spirits of my fathers, receive the soul of Stratonice!"

She fell back; and the beautiful form was only clay!

THE STORY OF HYAS.

“Poets are all who love—who feel great truths,
And tell them; and the truth of truths is love.”

PHILIP BAILY.

CHAPTER I.

SUNSHINE, clear, warm, and golden, such as is seen only in the land of Greece, rested on the summits of Mount Hymettus; Phœbus himself might have stayed his chariot there to gaze from the twin-crested hill, far over the Ægean, towards his native Delos. A troop of young Athenians went out of the city gates, all mounted and arrayed for the sport in which the youth of Attica delighted—a bear-hunt. The advancing strides of civilization had driven most of the wild beasts from the Attic promontory, far into the woody recesses of Etolia and the mountains of Thessaly; but still, occasionally, the “honey-lover” was attracted by the treasures of Mount Hymettus, and then, when the news reached Athens, all the youth set forth to join in the excitement of a bear-hunt. The groves of

the Academy were almost deserted—there were no wrestlers to join in the exercises of the Lycæum—all went forth to the sports on Mount Hymettus.

“Ha!” cried one of the young hunters, turning round and casting his eyes back on the city; “so the philosopher has still kept some truants by his side! Look, there is a little group yet on the promontory of Sunium, like a cluster of ants on the top of an ant-hill.”

“An apt metaphor, O Lycaon,” answered another. “I doubt not it would gratify the sage Plato—the great emmet lecturing his smaller ants on the pursuit of wisdom and foresight.”

“Rather say the Athenian bee, as our witty Crito called him,” cried a youth gorgeously attired, with an affected lisp in his voice. “Now, Lycaon, I will prove to you all, that though a bee is an emmet, an emmet is not a bee; therefore Plato is not a bee. And more-over ——”

“By Harpocrates! peace, thou glib-tongued Sophist,” said Lycaon; “we all know thou art not among the philosopher’s scholars—would thou wert, if Plato’s wisdom could stop thy tongue.”

“His wisdom could not keep our young Athenians from the bear-hunt,” observed another of the troop. “I wonder who are those few who stay with him now?”

“Glaucus and Myron, I know—oh, and Hyas! who brings his wealth among the poverty-stricken philosophers: be sure there will be Hyas among them.”

“Hyas is here,” said a voice, low, sweet, and yet with an indescribable burden of sadness in its tones; and as the speaker advanced, his countenance was seen. It was full of thought, yet its contour was still youthful—almost feminine in grace. It might not have been perfect in form, and yet it was beautiful; there was a depth and earnestness in the large clear eyes, changeable in their hue as the eastern sky after sunset, now of an intense brown, now shaded into the softest gray. His hair, of that deep red gold-colour, which the Greeks esteemed most beautiful, waved in long curls upon his shoulders, after the fashion of the time. But over all the charms of his face and mien was seen the same shadow which was heard in his voice, like one sad tone in a pleasant melody. No pain contracted the beautiful lips, and yet even their smile was pensive. No deep sorrow sat in the clear eyes, and yet there was in them a vague unquiet, a restless looking-forward, as if the soul within was ever yearning for something which it could not obtain.

“Hyas here!” repeated Lycaon, with a slightly sarcastic meaning in his tones. “Art thou so soon weary of the philosopher’s lore?”

Hyas smiled, and answered without bitterness, “All men like change, or else Lycaon would not be found deserting the banquet of Aspasia for the bear-hunt on Hymettus.”

“Fairly retorted,” rejoined the gaily attired youth who had been termed Sophist, while his loud but inane laugh greeted the discomfiture of the other, and

quickly circulated through the blithe-hearted crowd. Youth is ever so ready with its mirth.

“Has Hyas then deserted the groves of the Academy for ever?” asked a hunter.

“Not so,” the young man answered; “but one wearies of everything in time—change is good. I thought yesterday, that Plato grew too deeply metaphysical. His eloquence chilled, not warmed—it was like the shower of ice of which the northern barbarians tell, as glittering and as cold. I fancied a day on sunny Hymettus would cheer and brighten me, so I came.”

“Yet Hyas is no hunter,” sneered Lycaon. “Has he forgotten the story of Adonis?”

“Wrong again, Lycaon,” pompously observed the young sophist. “The simile is poor and ill-conceived, since I can prove that a boar is not a bear, and that Hyas is not Adonis, because there is no Venus to weep over him.”

“Saving our Aphrodite of Athens, our beautiful Phryne,” laughed one of the band.

“Still wrong,” continued Eryx the sophist; “for the fairest face in Athens might be a very Gorgon’s for all that Hyas cares. Minerva, Artemis, ay, and Juno herself, all united, would not make the image of perfection of which he dreams. Is it not so, friend?” He turned round to Hyas, but the youth’s countenance had recovered its habitual passive repose—he hardly noticed that they were speaking of him.

“By Jupiter, thou art incorrigible!” cried Lycaon.

“One may laugh near thee, and at thee, too; and it were as easy to provoke a speech from one of Minerva’s owls as a syllable from thy tongue, or a smile from thy lips. Well, Hyas, success to thy hunting, and may a goddess meet thee on Hymettus, instead of a boar—though, truly, I think thou wouldst care as little for the one as the other.”

In this light jesting conversation the young Athenians passed the intervening journey, until they penetrated into the far woods of Hymettus. Then began all the excitement of the chase. The baying of the Thracian hounds, the call of the hunters, rang through the still woods. One by one the young companions separated, as they dashed in succession after the bear. Even Hyas entered into the excitement of the scene, and followed for a short time the traces of the hunters. His cheek brightened with a faint, tender red, as he passed through the wilds of Hymettus, now breathing the clear fresh air on the mountain side, now plunging into the thick woody shades. But by degrees the sounds of the chase grew fainter, and he lost sight of the gay robes fluttering among the trees. His own passing enthusiasm became changed to weariness; and as the traces of the chase and those who followed it grew more indistinct, and the deep solitudes of the place gathered around him, he ceased to take any interest in the sport which had at first seemed so pleasant.

Hyas passed dreamily along, sometimes under the shade of trees, sometimes treading upon beds of fra-

grant thyme, where the musical bees kept up a perpetual murmur : first gay, and then, from its monotony, leading the mind to sad fancies. How strange it is, that in this world we should be ever sighing over the mutability of all things, when in the veriest trifles, even the sweet music of bees, an unchanging sameness becomes almost pain ! A thought such as this floated through the mind of the young Greek, and he began to moralize. It was one of the fantasies of his nature ; his life had been one of dreams, not of deeds, and he was ever more prone to muse than to act.

Wearied already, but oppressed more with lassitude of mind than of body, the youth threw himself on a soft thymy bank, which sloped down to a fountain ; not a bubbling rill, but a clear, deep spring, that seemed as calm as a tiny lake. Its waters welled forth as silently as a good man's generous deeds ; looking on them, no one could tell from whence the hidden spring gushed forth. An opening in the trees above let in a rift of sapphire, so that the still surface of the lakelet seemed but the entrance to an enchanted region of cloudless blue, through which fairy clouds wandered like white floating birds. There was no trace of earthly defilement in the beautiful spring ; it seemed to have received heaven into its bosom, as one who loves takes the image of his beloved in his heart, which thus loses its own foulness, and is made holy to its inmost depths by the reception of that pure and lovely ideal.

An inexpressible feeling, half sweet, half mournful,

oppressed the soul of Hyas, shutting out all the real world, and transporting him into a fanciful region, in which the mind of youth makes its own paradise. He wondered that he had never before seen this lovely dell, with its solitary spring, out of which none save the birds appeared ever to have drunk; upon which no eyes save those of the stars had ever looked. All the glow of excitement passed away from him, and left a quiet dreaminess; the bear-hunt, the jests and laughter of his companions, were as utterly blotted out from his memory as though they had never been. He rested his head on a tuft of hyacinths, crushing the flowers to make his perfumed pillow, and remained for hours watching the diamond stars of sunlight, that flickered among the leaves of the smilax under which he lay.

“This is better than listening to the lore of Plato,” thought Hyas. “Ay, the bees talk a sweeter language than the philosopher. And to lie dreaming here is truer happiness than to follow the sports of the chase. Ah! if the philosopher is wiser than the worldly man, the poet is wiser than the philosopher. The god-shepherd of Admetus was happier in the meads of Thessaly than was Jove in his own Olympus.”

But by degrees a weariness of spirit crept over the youth. The same shadow clouded his face now as it had done amidst the gay Athenian troop. There was an unsatisfied longing gnawing at his heart, and depriving it of rest. Beneath its influence the sky grew less blue—the warble of the birds changed from a carol

into a dirge—the blessed, quiet loneliness of the woods became like the dull solitude of a desert. When the day became gradually overclouded with the shadows of the evening, Hyas felt glad; there was a monotony in the continual sunshine which oppressed him. He longed for the coming of twilight, with its tender gloom and its mysterious stars. They would soothe him; those golden eyes of heaven would be like companions: he would be happy then, for he would not feel alone. O poet-soul!—type of poet-souls in all ages—here was thy vain yearning: ever seeking for something higher, purer, and more satisfying; putting aside the wine-cup of the present, with yet thirsty lips, and striving to quench that thirst with the life-waters of some imagined future. This was thy nature, O poet-heart! whose bliss never is, but always is to come—that heart whose yearnings after a perfect ideal can never meet fruition, until God fills it with His eternal NOW.

When the last sunbeams were slanting through the trees, Hyas rose up, and came and stood by the margin of the spring. A faint shadow had crept over the dream-land which lay imaged in its bosom. Hyas gazed into its depths, and as he beheld, a strange phantom appeared to rise therein. Two beautiful eyes looked at him from beneath the still water. They were not the reflection of his own, for he stood too far off, so that his figure, Narcissus-like, cast no image in the stream. Nor were they the eyes of planets, for the evening sky was yet starless. Hyas

trembled, but gazed on, until he saw the shadowy eyes assume form and brightness, and the phantom became a face of surpassing beauty, less like a woman's than an angel's. The young Greek instinctively looked behind him, but he was alone; it was only imaged in the water that he could see the face.

"It is the Naiad of the fountain," he whispered to himself, instinctively recurring to the belief which his countrymen held. "Yet the philosophers tell us that all such are but types of the invisible spirit of nature—dreams of man's imagining, and only dreams. Still the priests believe the contrary: Perhaps the tale of Hylas is no fable, and this lovely face is that of a nymph—I will dare to prove it."

As he spoke, Hyas knelt down beside the fountain; the face seemed to rise nearer and nearer to the surface, and two white cloud-like arms were stretched out, as if to meet his own.

"Beautiful shadow, I will tempt all for thee!" cried the impetuous boy, and he plunged his arms downwards towards the phantom. They only met the chilly waters of the spring, which bubbled up as if in resistance to his vain energy, and foamed and dashed against the flowering reeds which fringed its margin. Yet, from the clear depths beyond, the wonderful face looked at him still.

"I will come to thee, if it be to death," cried Hyas. "Oh, thou lovely one, where art thou?"

He would have plunged headlong into the fountain, but that he felt himself restrained. A touch, light as

the memory of some beloved embrace which has haunted us in dreams, and only dreams can again restore, was laid upon his neck. The strength of Antæus could not have had more power. He sank on the grass, like a child whom his mother overwhelms with her loving caresses, his eyes still fixed on the waters, and his voice still murmuring, "Where art thou?"

"I am beside thee, above thee, around thee!" was the reply.

It was unlike a human tone, yet it imparted nothing of the supernatural awe of a spirit visitant. It was more like that which we hear in solitary day-dreams, when the beloved face rises up before us like a vivid presence, and the beloved voice whispers in our ears words which are only the echo of our own hearts—words to which fancy alone gives a life-like reality, and yet we start and think we hear them still. Such was the voice that answered the impassioned call of Hyas. His eyes wandered around.

"I see thee not, dream of my soul—I cannot find thee," was his mournful cry. How oft has it been echoed since!

"Look in the waters, and thou shalt behold me," answered the voice. "I am the ideal of beauty, of purity, of happiness. No man living ever saw me face to face, but the true poet may behold my shadow reflected in the deep waters of his own soul, when it is untroubled and unstained. There he may see me, floating between himself and that heaven to which he

ever looks, and whither all his aspirations tend. Thus, and only thus, when the poet takes heaven into his soul, as the still wave takes the sky, can he see that perfect ideal, which he alone is able to apprehend."

Hyas drank in these words as a parched plant drinks in the droppings of April rain. The clouds passed away from his spirit, and it received new strength; his dim dreams took form and shape, and became "a living soul." As leaf by leaf a blossom opens, until at last one glorious burst of sunshine reveals the perfect flower, so at once his spirit passed from the vagueness of youth to the full stature of manhood. The poet rose up from his dreamy sleep, as Adam awoke at the touch of God in Paradise, conscious of his existence, and glorying and rejoicing in his power.

"This, then, is the image of bliss which I vainly sought," he cried. "This is the pure ideal which I found not in the pleasures of human life and human intercourse; for which I looked in the temples of the gods, in the schools of the philosophers, and, lo! it was not there. Now I recognise it, now I am strong. Let me go forth to the world, and bring all men to look with me on thy face, O dream of beauty! Let me show forth light to their darkness; let me speak to them of purity and holiness, until the ideal is recreated in mortal clay, and men become themselves the realization of the inspired dream."

Such was the first outburst of the poet-heart. Hyas did not notice, that even while he spoke the well

became dark with the darkening sky, and the face that had looked out from its depths was no longer seen. But when he turned and saw nothing in the waters but the stars as they came out one by one, then his heart sank within him, and would have become weighed down with sorrow but for the dream-like voice, the consciousness of in-dwelling divinity. He rose and prepared to return; but first he stooped down, drank, and laved his forehead with the waters of the mysterious fountain. It was the baptism of his soul, consecrating it to the highest mission of man on earth—that of the God-sent, God-hallowed poet.

CHAPTER II.

THE Pythian games had just begun, and the wide arena where they were celebrated was one moving mass of congregated humanity. There were assembled multitudes from all the Grecian States, giving to the scene an infinite variety. The rude Lacedemonian, in all the pride of his voluntary coarseness both of manners and attire, elbowed the elegant, effeminate Athenian; the barbarous, half-clad Etolian eyed with envious astonishment the blazing jewellery and rich attire of the luxurious Thessalian; while the warlike Messenian looked with equal contempt upon both, and the peace-loving Achaian stood by with placid indifference.

The treaty made by Nicias had just terminated the first Peloponnesian war, and all the conflicting animosities of the various Greek provinces were lulled into a temporary calm. The Pythian solemnities were celebrated with unusual devotion; victor and vanquished, oppressor and oppressed, all met in peace and amity on the small, forest-bounded plain, where lay the temple of the Delphian Apollo. Beautiful indeed looked the costly shrine, the treasure-house of all the sacred wealth of Greece, where a common worship created one bond of union, which, among all the stormy wars of the contending states, remained unbroken to the last. All were brethren at the Pythian games.

"Well met, well met, countryman!—it is something to see a friend's face in this wilderness of humanity!" cried a youth, whose glittering dress, as well as the golden grasshoppers fastening back his long perfumed curls, bespoke him an Athenian. "Lycaon! Stop—prithee stop!" he persisted, catching hold of the sober-hued pallium of the person he addressed. "I have been following thy tall head through the crowd these ten minutes; no easy task, I assure thee."

"Probably not," said the other, looking down with a half-sardonic smile on the small stature and effeminate attire of Eryx the Sophist. "This place is not quite so attractive for an easy promenade as our Athenian Ceramicus, nor so good for the exhibition of gold and embroidery."

"Right, right, Lycaon! I ever eschewed the Pythian

games until now ; and I had reason. Pah ! here is the stain of a dirty hand—that boor of an Acarnanian’s, I vow !—on the embroidery worked by Phryne’s own taper fingers. And, by Hermes ! here is a jewel missing from the hem of my purple chlamys ! It was that thief of a Cretan who helped me through the crowd. Oh, Lycaon, Lycaon, pity me ! The richest gem in Athens ! Alas, that it should fall into the hands of a Cretan knave !”

“As well belong to a knave as a fool,” muttered Lycaon.

“What was that thou saidst, friend ?” asked Eryx, lifting up his head from the piteous examination of his dilapidated garments.

“Merely that the jewel was a foolish jewel to slip so readily from a master who valued it—ay, even higher than himself, which is saying a great deal.”

“I did—I did, Lycaon !” lamented the unconscious Eryx. “Alas, for my jewel !”

“Couldst thou not follow that tall Cretan, and offer to teach him all thy wisdom in exchange for the jewel ? Convince him, by all the arguments you Sophists use, that what belongs to one man is not the property of another, unless he wants it more, or can use it better, or is able to steal it !”

Eryx shook his head in woeful despondency ; even his acquired sophistry had forsaken him in this mournful hour.

“No, no, we will say no more of this, Lycaon. Only let me stay by thee, for thou wilt be a protec-

tion in this crowd. Oh, what an enviable man was Hercules !”

“What, with his lion’s skin instead of thy Tyrian purple—his ignorance instead of the learning of Gorgias? Fie, Eryx! I, who am only a poor disciple of that visionary dreamer Pythagoras, who never wore an embroidered robe in his life, and knew no difference between a pearl and an onyx-stone—even I have more respect for my master than to put forward the nobility of mere bodily force! The mind—the mind is all, as none should know better than Eryx.”

The little Sophist smiled the placid, benignant smile of gratified vanity, which, while enveloping him with its soft, silken folds, proved as impenetrable as iron mail to all the shafts of sarcasm. He would have walked about fairly stuck all over with these arrows, as proud as an Indian of his robe of quills. Verily, there is a blessed unconsciousness in vanity! The self-distrustful, sensitive man, sometimes looks with momentary envy on the complacent fool.

“Let me peep over thy shoulder, Lycaon: the games are beginning,” said Eryx, trying to raise himself on tiptoe, in order to gaze in a direction where the movement of the crowd betokened some new sight.

It was the priests, who in long order were descending the marble steps of the temple to take their station among the judges in the centre of the plain, where a canopy with purple hangings shut out the glaring light of the sun. An altar and a statue of

Apollo were erected within, and beneath the seats of the judges the competitors in painting and sculpture had disposed their works. Eryx and Lycaon stood within a short distance of this post of honour; and when the Sophist had recovered himself, his tongue ran on glibly as ever, disposing itself for the idle criticism of one who is never at a loss for words, because he never pauses to think.

“There is the great work of Parrhasius, ‘Mercury with the Lyre.’ I saw it myself at Ephesus,” cried Eryx, now fully alive to his own importance. “Lycaon, behold that head of Hermes,—how gracefully the hair curls, just as we wear it at Athens now! Well, that was my doing. I said to my friend the artist, ‘Parrhasius, taste is everything; and as no one ever climbed to Olympus to see how the god wore his hair, we must arrange it as we see the most beautiful and tasteful of men on earth arrange theirs.’ And so Parrhasius assented,—nay, requested me to be his model. Observe, Lycaon, the very number of curls is the same! But thou look’st not at the picture!”

“No, for Parrhasius is a fool; and so are all those who spend time in adorning men’s bodies and leave their minds a ruin. It may suit those to whom animal life is all, but I—’tis a different thing with us.”

“Truly, thou art another man, Lycaon, since thou didst take to this Pythagorean whim. A sudden change! Thou wert the merriest jester of all our troop, and

now thou art full of the delights of poverty and wisdom; they always go together hand in hand."

"As riches and folly," sneered Lycaon.

"Well, well, the times are changed since we went hunting on Mount Hymettus. There was that quiet boy Hyas ——"

"As great a fool as any, with his dreams and his vagaries,—all springing from ignorance," said the caustic follower of the sect which had degenerated from the pure doctrines of its founder into a theory of mingled cynicism and mysticism, to which was united all the pride of learning.

"I always thought so: of course he was an ignorant fellow; he did not even know how to wear his pallium gracefully," said Eryx. "He had no wit either—not a single biting answer could he return; and as for beauty—bah! one would have thought he was ashamed to exhibit his teeth, for he never laughed."

"Perhaps that was the wisest thing he could do. I had forgotten the boy since I left Athens. Is he there still?"

"Oh, no, he has long disappeared! I saw him once after the bear-hunt, and then he seemed in a strange, wild frenzy, not like his old melancholy mood. He made me a speech, more dull than even the long-winded ones of Plato. I could not understand it, so I left him."

"Possibly he was mad."

"It might be; and in his madness he perished most likely, for he was never heard of afterwards. But

see, the trial begins between Parrhasius and another! Ah, I know him! 'Tis the young Zeuxis, a poor upstart. He to rival Parrhasius, who wears the golden crown, and calls himself the 'King of Painters!' But I must be mute."

"Thank the gods for that!" ejaculated the Pythagorean aside. "Ah, my master, the three years' probation of silence was a wise law of thine."

The painters stood forth, each beside his work. The eyes of all the assembly turned on that of the young Zeuxis; a bunch of grapes, glowing and luscious.

"It is life itself—it would deceive the very birds!" cried the multitude.

"We will see," answered Parrhasius; and he ordered one of his slaves to bring a linnet.

The bird flew at the canvass, and pecked eagerly at the deceitful banquet. A shout of triumph greeted the trembling, shrinking youth; and he lifted up his head with a look of pleasure.

"Now, Parrhasius, raise the curtain that hides thy picture," said Zeuxis, when the shouts ceased.

The haughty painter's lips curled.

"Foolish boy, *the curtain* is the picture! See, O judges, Zeuxis deceived the bird, but Parrhasius has deceived Zeuxis himself! Which is the greater?"

"Parrhasius! Parrhasius, is the king of painters!" echoed the crowd; while Parrhasius drew his purple robe round him in stately triumph. He thought more of that ovation than of the glory of his art.

Zeuxis neither trembled nor looked humbled now;

his whole bearing seemed changed. With a lofty smile, he turned away from the enthusiastic crowd.

"Thou hast triumphed, Parrhasius," he said; "but I have another picture still."

He placed it before the eyes of all: it was the young Apollo slaying the Python, and never did painter's dream embody a more divine image. The god stood serene in his triumph; calm, yet joyful; his foot on the serpent's neck, his bright hair thrown back; seeming less proud of victory over the mud-created reptile that grovelled at his feet than conscious of the inward strength which had caused the earth-born creature to be conquered by the divine.

The crowd were silent—awe-struck for a moment. Genius ever has this power of bowing the multitude with an emotion akin to fear. But soon they turned to the painted curtain of Parrhasius; the petty cheat was more to them than the glorious image with its deep allegory. They could understand the first, the latter was beyond them.

"Zeuxis is a great man, but Parrhasius is the king of painters!" was the cry that sealed the destiny of both.

The young Zeuxis took his picture in his arms, as if it were a beloved and slighted child, and descended the platform. His face was very pale, but there was a firmness on the compressed lips, a strength and dignity on the noble brow, that seemed strange in one vanquished.

“I have lived for Fame; I will now live for Art alone,” murmured the young painter. His life records the glorious result of that vow.

And now came on the great trial of all, the competition in those arts especially sacred to Apollo—poesy and song. The musicians came with their cheerful lyres, their wailing flutes, and, above all, the harp which the god loved, and failing which Hesiod himself was once forbidden to chant his songs at the Pythian solemnities. The minstrels hymned the praises of their divinity until the multitude were entranced with joy; the choral strains rose up to the overhanging summit of Parnassus, so that the Muses themselves might have bent down and listened to the orisons of their worshippers. Enthusiastically the crowd echoed the song; tributary wreaths of flowers fell on the lyres and harps; and then, when the rejoicing music faded into silence, a poet appeared.

He was a young man, whose flowing golden hair, and lithe, graceful stature, together with the small harp which he bore in his hand, made him not an unapt representative of the Greek ideal of the god of Delphi. The multitude were startled; not a breath stirred the air when the poet began.

He sang, in a kind of recitative, a hymn to Apollo, as the Serpent-slayer, the Deliverer from Evil. He spoke of the wondrous birth at Delphi—half earthly, half divine; sprung from a mortal mother, yet imbued with the spirit of divinity; so that from very infancy It burst at once to the full strength and stature of

a man—nay, of a god! Then he celebrated Apollo the inspired—the giver of song and poetry—the child of heaven, born to enlighten earth, whose presence was as the sun itself, kindling the world with life, and warmth, and loveliness; at whose very birth all Nature rejoiced, and grew brighter under the footsteps of the divine child!

Again, he changed his strain, and sang of the terrible Python—the serpent created out of mud and slime—the curse of the world, crawling along with head never raised except to devour and destroy that which is beautiful; hideous itself, and hating beauty—vile, and seeking to convert good to its own nature—the incarnation of Evil.

“It comes,” he chanted, “nearer still; the numbing power of its pestiferous breath is already cast upon the son of Jove! Shall he perish? No, he is strong,—strong in his purity, his beautiful and fearless youth! The spirit of the god is in him; he knows it—he feels it, and enters on the fray. Shrink not, ye spirits of earth and heaven who behold the conflict,—shrink not if, at times, the young limbs quiver, the breath comes faint; it is the earthly mother-nature that clings to him, but the child of heaven cannot fall! See, his foot is on the serpent, the creature writes in his death-throes! Evoe, Evoe, Apollo! Shout for the Deliverer from Evil! Genius has conquered the world!”

The poet ceased, and stood with flashing eyes and dilated stature, himself appearing the incarnation of the triumphant god of whom he sang. The multitude felt

it, and while the wild chorus of "Evoe, Evoe, Apollo!" was re-echoed from them as from one man, all eyes turned with a superstitious wonder towards the inspired being who had thus swayed them.

"It is the god himself!" cried some; and they looked toward the summit of Parnassus, where the sunset rested, as if they almost expected to see the chariot of Apollo awaiting the divine minstrel. The poet stood, now no longer excited, but calm and very pale, though with a glad and holy light beaming in his eyes, while a stream of golden glory rested on his hair, and stole down to the harp which he yet held in his arms.

The priests—wise hypocrites, who knew the falsehood of their outward forms, but did not know the divine truth of the myth thus shadowed forth—the priests smiled aside at the ignorant enthusiasm of the crowd, yet repressed it not. How should they? But one of the judges, a good and wise man, addressed the minstrel:—

"Who art thou, whose song has moved us thus?"

The youth bent his head, then lifted it in noble pride, and said, in the same low, sweet tone which had once been heard in the woods of Hymettus,—

"I am Hyas the Athenian."

"Jupiter save us!" cried a small gaudy butterfly of a man, springing from the shoulder of another much taller, who stood in the crowd near the judges' post of honour; "Jupiter save us! it is the mad boy come to life again! Hyas, Hyas, here is thy friend Eryx,

who always loved thee; and Lycaon—he will sneer at thee no more, I promise. Turn round and look at us, noble Hyas!”

These shrill exclamations failed in attracting the attention of the youth to whom they were addressed, but succeeded in mightily amusing the crowd, whom Eryx harangued with his native volubility.

“Yes, fellow-citizens and Greeks, I assure you I know him quite well. He often used to say, ‘Eryx, thou art my dearest friend!’ Oh, what a noble youth he was, and how I grieved when I thought he was dead! One half of my long locks hang still in the temple at Athens as mournful offerings to his manes.”

“Where didst thou borrow those thou now hast?” was the sportive inquiry of the crowd; while a fruitless attempt was made to snatch the golden grasshoppers from the abundant curls of the Sophist.

“Idiot, come away,” muttered the Pythagorean; and Eryx was almost carried off in the strong arms of Lycaon, still calling upon “Hyas, his dear, noble friend Hyas,” to come to his succour.

Meantime, heedless, unconscious of all that passed in the crowd beneath, Hyas bent before the judges, to receive the crown which was universally decreed as his due. The white-haired judge who first addressed him, placed the wreath of palm-leaves on his head, saying,—

“Take thy meed, my countryman, for Athens has cause to be proud of thee. Her noblest ones will welcome thee when thou re-enterest the city gates; and

none will rejoice in thee more than Eurymedon. Greeks, cry, all of you, Hail to the Pythian victor! Hail to Hyas the Athenian!"

The poet had triumphed; a little while and his name would ring through Greece; statues would immortalize him while living; his native city would do homage before him. Hyas thought of all this—it rushed upon him like a flood of radiant joy, and his imagination was dazzled. He descended the raised canopy with the step of a king; he saw nothing but a confused mass of gazing countenances; heard nothing but the murmur of rapturous applause, that followed him even to his home at Delphi. There he passed into solitude, like one who glides from sunshine into shade. Yet the dim shadow was refreshing, for it gave him opportunity fully to pour out his joy.

"What is poetry without fame? I never knew its true bliss until now," he murmured. "Oh, fame is glorious! glorious!"

A faint sigh met his ear, and the face of the poet became clouded as he looked on one to whom his joy brought bitterness; at least, he thought so; but Hyas knew not the heart of Zeuxis.

"Fame is glorious; but there is one thing more glorious still—the power to deserve it!" said the young painter. "I rejoice with thee, my friend; not so much because that palm-crown decks thy brow, and the shouts of praise yet ring in thine ears, but because thou hast fulfilled thy mission, and the poet stands confessed. The world has acknowledged thee; it is

well; but if not, thou wouldst have been the divine poet still. Hail to thee, dear Hyas!"

So softly, yet not sadly, were these words uttered, that Hyas was melted to tears. He fell on his friend's neck and embraced him.

"Oh, Zeuxis, would that thou hadst been the victor, too! Thou art greater than I. Can I trust the shouts of those voices that were silent towards thee? Oh, my friend, that I could give thee my joy, and take thy sorrow!"

"It is no sorrow, Hyas," calmly answered the painter: "it is only a broken dream; and I wake stronger and wiser to follow after the real and the true."

Hyas listened, but there was an incredulous whisper in his heart; and the palm-leaves fluttered on his brow, like the caressing wings of the angel-faced fiend which lures men on, by the spell of vanity, ambition, or love of fame, to sell their souls for one moment's shout of acclaim, one hour of flattered pride. Already between Hyas and the pure ideal of his aspirations a shadow crept, and the blessed vision which had haunted him through all his years of wandering, when the poet's soul struggled in its swaddling-bands, which had sustained him through doubts and fears, and nurtured his spirit into perfect manhood,—the beautiful dream was almost forgotten. The face in the fountain showed faint and dimly even in memory.

CHAPTER III.

“LEAVE me, good friends,” said Hyas, when the procession in his honour was escorting the young poet over the hills of Hymettus to his native Athens, which had opened her gates in triumphant pride to receive the Pythian victor. “Leave me, kind friends; I must have an hour of solitude and meditation: this pomp is too much,” wearily added he, while a lurking smile somewhat counteracted the meaning of his half haughty, half languid tones.

“There spake the noble Hyas, the son of Apollo!” cried the multitude, ready for the time to echo and applaud every wish of their idol. “Let him have his will, and be left alone to seek inspiration from the god.”

“Ah, Lycaon, how great it is to be a poet!” exclaimed the ever-constant Eryx, who followed like a shadow after wealth and popularity. “How noble is Hyas, to steal away from the adoring crowd for peaceful solitude.”

“A month ago, and it would have been called paltry affectation,” said Lycaon, with an envious sneer curling his lip.

The tones caught the ear of Hyas, and his cheek crimsoned, while a momentary sting of conscience barbed the arrow-words. But soon the applauding murmur around lulled the passing pain; and Hyas stepped from his chariot with a heart that swelled with

conscious pride. The shout of the multitude arose behind him, and reached even to the dim recesses of the wood. What a change! Could it be, that he who passed along with a step so lofty, whose jewelled garments swept the dead leaves as he moved, was indeed the dreamy youth who had walked under the same green shades with timid foot and drooping head, almost shrinking from the whisper of the boughs?

“Eryx said truly,” murmured Hyas; “it is great to be a poet, to sway the multitude, and be worshipped like a god—Apollo himself could desire no more. It is glorious to return thus with the pomp, power, and success, of which I dreamed long ago in this spot. No, not that olden dream,” he added, as a consciousness, against which he would fain have steeled his heart, oppressed it despite his will. “Not the same dream, but another far higher—Yes, it must be higher! How idle was that visionary fancy of making the world wiser and nobler—myself the while unknown! No, it is best to dazzle and blind them with my glory, as I do now.”

And, as he passed on, in his fancy the sunshine seemed to wrap him with radiance; the birds to sing pæans of welcome; the very branches to bend before him in homage.

“All these were once ministrants of inspiration to me; I am now made to immortalize them. Rejoice, O woods! for one of the great of earth is come among you. And thou, beautiful face, how gloriously thou wilt beam on me when I bring my triumph to thy fountain! On, then, on!”

Thus thought Hyas. As he came with a proud step to the mystic dell, he never looked at the flowers that grew in his path, but trod them under his feet; and it seemed that their perfumed lives were exhaled in a wordless complaint against man's cruelty. At last he came to the charmed spring and looked in.

Alas for Hyas! no beautiful phantom beheld he there. The waters were dark and troubled, and swayed with a strange and restless motion. Even the overhanging lilies on the brim sought in vain for their shadows in the cloudy depths beneath; and though the sky above was serenely blue, as on the day when it looked down upon the young dreamer resting on his hyacinth couch, yet it found no reflex on the darkened wave. As Hyas beheld, he sighed with a deep and bitter sigh; and the pines around the fountain answered it with a dirge-like moan.

O change! O mournful change! the world with its vainglorious pomp, and its petty vanity, had come between the poet and his pure ideal, and the shadowy image was no longer there. He would see it no more, for the unstained holiness of his spirit was gone. The blue dream-land, with its white floating clouds—glad fancies that had studded the heaven of holy aspirations; the beautiful eyes which had looked into his, full of calmness and peace, and love that wore in its semblance only so much of earth as to temper the radiance of the divine—gone—all gone! The inner life, the Ideal after which he had striven, was no more.

The trees waved, the birds sang, the clouds wandered

over the sky ; but there was a change, a bitter and a mournful change—the more sorrowful since Hyas knew it not. He persuaded himself that the past had been an idle dream of excited fancy ; that no sweet face had ever beamed from the depths of the fountain ; that its waters must always have been obscure as now. He would seek no more for a vain shadow, the creation of his own brain. So he rose up, and turned away with haste. As he departed, he fancied once that a faint, mournful voice called him by name ; but at that moment gorgeous robes flashed through the trees ; the sound of lyres and flutes mingled with the birds' songs, and above all, arose the cry of “ Hyas ! hail to Hyas the noble poet, the pride of Athens ! ” That loud world-shout drowned the inward voice ; it melted into silence, and was heard no more.

Athens wore a festal garb in honour of the young victor. All to him was sunshine ; the senators gave him their tardy praise ; the philosophers spoke of him to their pupils ; and the youth of Athens, who had once numbered him among their companions, now recounted his sayings of old, and discovered that they had seen in him innumerable signs of dawning genius even then. Eryx constituted himself priest and flatterer-general to the new idol ; and Hyas endured his vapid sayings with a complaisance that sprang half from indifference, half from an ever-restless desire to be free from his own thoughts. In the midst of his glory, the same gloom that had oppressed him of old, stole over the heart of the poet ; but it was not now a light autumn-mist, it

was a thick darkness that could not be swept away. Day after day, night after night, it gathered more and more. It sat with him at the banquets given in his honour; it followed him in the streets that resounded with his praise; it haunted him as the pale spectre of the Spartan virgin haunted her murderer. And it was just; for he had destroyed—not a mortal life, but one infinitely more precious—the life within. He had been the slayer of his own soul.

Of all the early companions of Hyas, Eryx the Sophist was the only one with whom he now maintained any fellowship. Lyacon dwelt at Athens; but there was something in the icy haughtiness of the Pythagorean that revolted against the yet warm nature of the poet. Lycaon fenced himself round with the pomp and pride of wisdom, and poured from that rugged fortress all the arrows of his sharp and poisoned wit. Hyas loved him not; and he hated Hyas with all the bitterness of an envious and disappointed spirit.

Thus went on the world without, and thus the world within. How little did the two assimilate! At last, darker and darker grew the soul of Hyas; and his songs, once so redolent of all that was noble, happy, and pure, now became full of grim sorrow or biting satire, so that many shrank from him. There was one true and earnest spirit that would have poured balm on the wound; but Zeuxis was far away, in his quiet and lowly home, training towards all lofty purposes the great soul that had kept true, and would evermore keep true to its own lofty ideal.

“I am almost weary of being thy friend, Hyas,” said the sharp voice of Eryx. “It is quite a labour to make excuses for thy waywardness. Half the city complains of thee, the other half wonders at thee.”

“I care not,” wearily replied Hyas, stretching himself on the silken cushions of his dwelling, which was enriched with all the costliness of wealth, and adorned with all that taste could bestow.

“But thou oughtest to care,” persisted the Sophist. “Come, there is a banquet to-day at Eurymedon’s. Ha! ha! thy face brightens at the name. Thou rememberest the Pythian crown still. Well, Eurymedon has just returned to Athens, and seeks thee, Hyas.”

“Does he so?” said the poet, relapsing again into the careless indifference which was becoming habitual to him.

“Yes; and he is a very particular friend of mine, and he has one fair daughter, who—— But I am silent,” affectedly lisped the young man, glancing at the reflection of his small dapper self in a shield of polished steel, which, no longer used in warfare, was made an appliance of vanity.

Hyas turned away in as much disgust as his languid manner could assume.

“Harpocrates aid thee, then; thou needest his help much!” he answered.

“Ah, Hyas, but if thou didst care for beauty, truly Eurymedon’s daughter is very fair. I have often thought how well the wild thyme garland will become her brow when I bring her home in the bridal chariot.”

“Is it even so,” said Hyas, smiling. “And the girl loves thee?”

“Why not? I am rich. I have poured at her threshold a very ocean of libations; covered it with garlands; stripped whole boughs of smilax for leaves whereon to write ‘Euthyma.’ A sweet name, is it not? Of course she will choose me as her bridegroom, and her father will confirm it. O Euthyma! beautiful Euthyma!”

“Hast thou done talking, Eryx?” was the impatient reply.

“Hyas, thou art cruel! But thou hast never been in love!”

“Have I not, when I have sung every fair face in Athens? But they are all alike—woman’s love is a merry jest. However, I am willing to go to Eury-medon’s. He had a kind voice and look, which were pleasant to me, and I would fain see him again. Come!”

The two companions went to the banquet. All the guests rose at their entrance; and the couch nearest to the host was given to Hyas. The young man felt glad to be under the influence of the kindly face of the aged senator, which carried with it an inexplicable charm. The beauty of a calm, holy, and benign old age, impressed Hyas with like feelings of quietness and peace. All the conflicting elements of the banquet, wherein were mingled the courtly sportiveness of Alcibiades, the grave discourse of Plato, the acute but shallow wit of Gorgias the Sophist, could not turn the

attention of Hyas from his host. And when, after the customary libations, fair young slaves came in as cup-bearers, and the thoughts of the guests were divided between the rich wines of Eurymedon and the beauty of his handmaidens, Hyas heeded neither, until Eryx crept to him and pulled his embroidered sleeve.

“Look, Hyas, it is herself! How strange that she should be here! Hush! but look!”

Hyas looked, and at the further end of the chamber stood a young girl. She was attired like the slaves, but her face and form were half concealed by a light veil, and she seemed shrinking from observation behind the heavy purple curtains. From beneath the gauze-like drapery of her veil she looked eagerly towards the unconscious guests. Hyas trembled under the fixed gaze of those beautiful eyes—they reminded him of an almost forgotten dream. Strange! most strange! the lovely girlish face that gleamed from beneath the shadowy veil resembled the vision that Hyas had seen in the pure days of his youth. It was the earthly semblance of the face in the fountain.

As the poet looked, his whole being felt a thrill. He could have sprung to meet the heavenly vision, but it seemed to melt away, slowly, lingeringly, like the image in the water. When he saw it no more, Hyas felt as if the light of day had been suddenly withdrawn. Eryx whispered his idiot raptures; the confused murmur of voices arose; the conversation was mingled with Bacchic song: but Hyas heard nothing—his eyes

were fixed on the purple curtain which had shut out the lovely image. Only once when he turned he encountered the fixed look of Lycaon the Pythagorean—a look of scorn, anger, anxiety. The eyes of the two young men met, and then turned involuntarily to the same object—the curtain beneath which Euthyma had stood. At that moment each read the other's heart.

“Thou art pale and weary: our festal mirth suits not thy tastes, Hyas,” said the good Eurymedon. “Thou wouldst leave the banquet? Well, I have a garden that Flora herself might love. The evening breeze under the olive-trees will be more pleasant than this scene to a poet like thee. Go, dear Hyas.”

And gladly Hyas crept away, for his heart was full. That sudden vision had brought back feelings that had hitherto seemed dead within him; all the freshness of his youth, its pure aspirations, its earnestness after the good and the true, its bursting joy and its pensive dreaminess, more delicious still. He wandered under the olive shades with a strange feeling, half-glad, half-mournful; and ever between the flickering leaves, and in the cloud-shadows of the sky, his fancy seemed to picture that beautiful face.

At length he heard through the trees a voice singing, whose sweetness seemed like that of those divine eyes translated into music. He listened: it was one of his own songs; a song of that old happy time when the poet's soul first burst to a consciousness of its power, and overflowed with holy thoughts, and world-wide

love, and purest gladness, before the shadow had come between him and his nobler self, and shut out the image of the fountain. It was a joyous hymn, which the poet's heart had sent up to heaven, a loving call on the whole brotherhood of true men throughout the world. As he listened, its spell made the cloud that had so long overshadowed him melt away into a holy dew. Hyas leaned his head against the thick olive-trees and wept. Oh, how blessed were those tears!

The strain ceased, and another voice broke like a harsh tone on that happy dream.

"Euthyma, not weary yet of the Pythian victor's songs?"

"All Athens sings them, and why not I?" was the answer. Hyas felt it came from no other lips than *hers*.

"The more since thy wild fantasy has been gratified, and thou hast looked upon the poet's face. How would thy father have frowned had he known that only a slave's mantle hid his treasure from the rude eyes of the banqueters?"

"I saw them not," murmured Euthyma; "I only saw *him*."

"What, thy father!"

"Hyas, Hyas!" softly answered the girl, as if she took pleasure in lingering over the name; it had never before sounded so sweet to him who bore it. "Yes, I am glad I looked; he is like my dream. Oh, nurse! how beautiful he is, with his long golden hair and his

sweet eyes ! I could kneel before him and think it was the Apollo that Zeuxis drew !”

“ That which Eurymedon brought from Delphi, and which thou art watching and gazing at day after day ? ”

“ Why not, dear nurse ? It is beautiful, therefore I love it ; even as I love the songs of Hyas. Is this wrong ? ”

“ Maybe not ; thou wert ever too wise for me, child : only I would not the Athenian maidens should know that the daughter of Eurymedon thinks and speaks thus tenderly of a stranger. But the sun is setting, and my master will be calling thee.”

“ I will come soon,” answered Euthyma ; “ when I have sung my orisons to Apollo, the god of Hyas, who inspires and watches over him, the Athenians say.” And then her clear young voice awoke again in a portion of the hymn wherein the poet had celebrated the Deliverer from Evil. Hyas looked through the leaves and beheld Euthyma where she stood, with the warm glow of sunset falling on her face, and lighting up her hyacinthine hair. Her presence filled his whole being, transfusing it with unutterable joy ; he moved not ; he did not even wish to go nearer, lest the dream should vanish ; but he watched her and knew that he had found the one true love of life, to which all others are but shadows—the reflection of his own nature on that of another—the ideal of his soul.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM the day of Eurymedon's banquet a deeper meaning awoke in the poet's songs; the divine shadow of Love had fallen upon his spirit, and sublimated all things to its own essence. There had been a time when, goaded on by the never-satisfying longing, the dreary void which was in his heart, the poet in his thirst for wild excitement had degraded his holy mission, and given his power of song to Bacchic orgies, to worldly adulation of the rich or the beautiful, or to that bitter satire which keeps its Argus-eyes open to the evil it decries, until it ceases to believe in the very existence of good. All this could be no longer. Those beautiful eyes seemed ever looking into the depths of his heart, and beneath their influence all thoughts that had once defiled it fled away. Again the haunting image of his boyhood rose up before him; it was now mingled with an earthly ideal, as pure and almost as beautiful. The face of the fountain seemed but a shadowing forth of the beloved Euthyma.

The daughter of Eurymedon remained shut up in her customary but not unpleasing solitude; at stated times mingling with other high-born women in the religious processions, which formed the only intercourse which Athenian maidens had with the world. Euthyma had known no other life, and desired none. She had created around her a dreamer's paradise; its

centre one blissful image, the embodiment of what Zeuxis painted and Hyas sung. The day which had so strangely coloured the poet's fate was not without its influence on her. Her dim dreams took shape and hue, and were transformed into the love-idol that a true woman makes to herself but once in a lifetime. Its presence haunted her, engrossing her whole soul, ruling her thoughts, until all converged towards itself. The glorious image was now no ideal transcript of perfection, no pictured Apollo; it came in human likeness, with the bright floating hair and the deep clear eyes, the likeness of Hyas! Ere the maiden knew it herself, her girlish admiration had become woman's love.

A love like this has in it something of religious adoration, inasmuch as it is long content with the simple worshipping of its divinity, and looks no more for a return than the priestess at the shrine expects that the god should vouchsafe audible answer to her vows. So Euthyma, absorbed in the bliss of loving, never dreamed of being herself loved; only at times when the poet's songs reached her loneliness, imbued with all the new life with which she herself had inspired them, they found a mysterious echo in Euthyma's bosom. Sometimes their outburstings of love made her heart thrill with answering joy, and then caused it almost to cease its beating, chilled by a vague jealousy; while a sadness uncontrollable possessed her. How happy must be the maiden whom Hyas loved! Yet it might be only a poet's ideal; Euthyma almost hoped thus, and yet she knew not why.

The great festival of the Athenian maidens was the Panathenæa. These days of religious celebration in honour of Minerva came in the pleasant season of early summer, and the young patrician maidens, who then appeared in procession as *canephoræ*, counted, for months and months previous, the time when they should walk through the city, admiring and admired, bearing their golden baskets and following the sacred *peplos*, the embroidered garment of Minerva. Many a young heart beat with anticipation, vanity, or curiosity; one rejoiced to mingle in the gay show, another to wear her rich garments, a third to show her dazzling beauty to men's eyes. Euthyma had but one thought—that there she would see Hyas. She knew not how faithfully heart responded to heart; that when the poet was reminded of the new glory he would acquire, since, according to the custom lately introduced by Pericles, the solemnities were to be crowned by hymns in praise of Harmodius and Aristogiton—the chosen bard none other than the Pythian victor, the darling of the Athenians—Hyas cared for nothing, thought of nothing, save that in the glittering show he would surely see again the beautiful face which had become his inspiration—the face of Euthyma.

The procession passed by in all its pomp; the aged men of the city, with their green olive boughs; the armed warriors; the strangers, each carrying the symbol of his foreign birth, a small gilded boat; the youths, crowned with millet, chanting pæans to the goddess; and last of all the golden basket-bearers, or

*canephor*i. On came the virgin troop, some with their eyes cast down in maidenly shame-facedness; others with bold, wandering looks, seeking for admiration; and some darting now and then, from under their long lashes, passing glances, like frightened deer.

Hyas had sought to be free from the prying friend who ever kept close to him in all public places, as if seeking to catch the infection of fame through perpetual contiguity. But Eryx was more persevering still.

“Hyas, Hyas, look!” cried the sharp, distinct tones of the Sophist, as the last division of *canephor*i passed by. One of the maidens started — trembled; the golden basket which she bore on her head fell to the ground, and all its flowery treasures were poured at her feet.

Oh, happy lover! who was close by to gather up the scattered flowers, whose hand replaced the graceful burden, and touched for one moment the soft, scented hair on which it rested; and, oh, happy maiden! who, as the procession moved on, looked up amidst her blushes and met those earnest eyes, and felt that their mute language was none other than the eloquence of love. At once heart sprang to heart with a glad response; each had found, and *knew* that it had found, its other self—the life of its life. Henceforth, whenever the calm home-solitude of Eurymedon’s daughter was visited by the poet’s songs, they spoke unto her as soul speaks to soul. Often, after the Athenian fashion of wooing, garlands were hung at her threshold by

invisible hands, and she saw her name carved on the trees; while many an olive-leaf floated in her path bearing the same inscription—"Euthyma;" but the maiden heeded not these outward signs of the power of her beauty over many others. She felt only the silent worship, deepest of all, of one.

At last Eurymedon called his only child to him, and told her that the time was come when the bridal chariot must bear her from her father's house to that of another. Then it was that a terrible fear fell upon the heart of the young dreamer, and reality shut out all the dim visions of fancy.

"Oh, father, I am so happy, I seek no bridegroom! Let me stay with thee!" implored the girl.

Eurymedon answered her gently and kindly, but told her that the last of his house must not die unwedded, and that of the three wooers who sought her she must choose one. There was a flitting smile on the father's lips, as he took her hand and led her to where these suitors awaited her presence; the old nurse, as she met her master's eye, arranged Euthyma's veil, kissed the blushing, weeping face of her darling, and bade her be comforted, for she was happier than she deemed.

Eurymedon's daughter glanced fearfully at the three who sought her hand. Eryx, whose attire was a very rose-garden of perfumes and hues, flung himself at her feet. Lycaon, drawing up his tall person in all the pride of learning, seemed to think he did great honour to the shrinking girl in making her the bride of a

philosopher. The third stood a little retired, looking on her with eyes of speechless love. Euthyma met them, and a deep joy beamed in her own; her whole soul drank gladness from the presence of Hyas.

“Beautiful Euthyma!” cried Eryx, “I have loved thee ever since I saw thee, three years ago, in that exquisite white peplos, with gold lilies, at the Panathenæa. I do not speak of myself—I scorn it—but I am the richest man in Athens; and the bride of Eryx shall have a peplos as fine as Minerva’s, and jewels and palaces without end.”

“Peace, chattering fool!” said the stern Lycaon, stepping before him, “the daughter of Eurymedon regards not such vanities. Maiden, what I am thou seest. I am not rich, but the chosen wife of Lycaon the Pythagorean will think less of her husband’s wealth than of his wisdom. Satisfied of this, I take thee, if thou art willing.”

The loud, self-confident tones of the philosopher, were followed by silence; and then Hyas said, in that low voice for which he was remarkable, whose exquisite modulations fell like music on all hearts,—

“Euthyma, I have nothing worthy of thee but my love! Look on me, for I love thee!”

“My daughter, choose,” said Eurymedon. “Thou alone art the arbiter of thy destiny.”

Then Euthyma covered herself with her veil, like Penelope of Ithaca, and laid her hand in that of her heart’s beloved. Her choice was made.

An hour later, and the betrothed ones sat together

in the olive-garden, pouring out their full hearts each to each. Hyas reclined at the feet of Euthyma; her hand rested on his neck, and wandered lovingly amidst his hair. He had told her of all his life, his early dreams, his errors, his repentance.

“I am not worthy of thee, my beloved! How can I bring to thee my heart, with all its waywardness, its gloom? How can I darken thy young life by uniting it with mine?” sighed Hyas, as even then all the doubts and mournful fancies of old came across his mind. “Dost thou know that even amidst the joy of love I have been sad—that all my life has been a vain pursuit after happiness—that I am fitful and dreamy—that I have been very proud and vain, and even now the faint shadow of that cloud lingers on my spirit? How wilt thou bear with all this?”

But Euthyma answered,—

“I love thee! thou to me art all that is noble, and good, and fair. I desire no higher lot than to bow my spirit before thine; to worship thee, to encompass thee with love—love that asks no greater meed than the right to make thee happy. Come to me, beloved of my soul! repose thy heart on mine, and it shall bring thee peace. Art thou weak? I will be thy strength. Art thou sorrowful? I will soothe thy sorrow into gladness. Take me, O thou who art my life’s blessing! let that life be given for thee, be spent in ministering to thee, until it become absorbed in thine!”

As she spoke, Euthyma leaned over her betrothed

until her forehead rested on his, and her long, dark tresses fell around him like a cloud. The poet knew that his soul had found a haven, a blessed resting-place, where, encompassed by all-pervading, all-satisfying love, it would be at peace, and wander no more.

Then Hyas grew strong, and his spirit was renewed in all the pure feeling of its youth. He now understood why the face in the fountain had been invisible to him, from the evil that defiled and darkened his soul. Love, the refiner, had purified it; love, the sun of life, had swept away its clouds, and Hyas felt that he dared look once more into the depths of the mystic spring. Therefore, when the daughter of Eurymedon went with her maidens to gather, with customary solemnities, the bridal garland of wild thyme, and the bees on Hymettus were scared away by the merry laughter of girlhood, Hyas, following ever like a shadow the steps of his beloved, was drawn to the olden spot.

Trembling, doubting, yet hoping, he stood under the smilax tree, and gazed into the waters. They were still and pure as when he first beheld them; and, lo! gradually, as the clouds formed themselves into shape on the bosom of the sky, out of the clear heaven reflected in the spring arose the beautiful image. The eyes, full of deep, tender joy, looked into the poet's soul, and thrilled him with a holy rapture.

“Oh, blessed dream of my youth, leave me never

more!" he cried; "let me ever behold thee as I do this day; keep my heart pure, that my eyes, all unclouded, may be able to look on thy beauty!"

While Hyas spoke, the sky reflected in the waters seemed overflowed with a burst of sunshine, so radiant that beneath its power the shadowy face melted away as the moon fades in the glowing splendours of mid-day. It was not overshadowed, but absorbed in light, its own beauty swallowed up in a still greater glory.

Hyas marvelled, and grew sorrowful; but, as if in answer to his fears, the voice, remembered of old, spoke to his heart—

"Despair not, though thou seest me no more; thou hast no need of me; the shadow of thy soul has become a dream no longer. Rejoice, and go on thy way with a strong and earnest heart, for thou hast attained the poet's true ideal as near as earth can bestow."

Still vaguely comprehending the meaning, Hyas cried sadly—

"Oh, beautiful image! shall I see thee no more? Where then shall I find my spirit's desire, its guiding strength, its inspiration?"

"Look once more in the waters, and thou shalt behold it."

He looked, and reflected in the spring was no airy phantom, but a woman's face, the wild-thyme garland waving over the clear brow and loving eyes. Hyas turned, and felt round his neck the warm

arms of Euthyma; and while he clasped his bride to his bosom, the young Athenian knew that the poet's best ideal on earth is a true-hearted woman's love.

THE CROSS ON THE SNOW MOUNTAINS.

A Scandinavian Tale.

CHAPTER I.

A SHIP—a rude, pine-built vessel—lay tossing, heaving, tempest-driven, on a southern sea. Wild-looking Norsemen were on her deck, breasting the storm, and controlling the ship with a desperate strength and an almost ferocious energy, which in those early days stood in the place of skill. For it was the time of Europe's stormy, unfettered youth, when civilization was just dawning in those of its climes which were nearest the sun. But the ship came from the wild and savage North; her pine timbers had once rocked to the tempests in a Scandinavian forest, and afterwards, winter by winter, had struggled with the ice-bound waters of Scandinavian seas. It was the ship of a Viking.

The vessel wrestled between sea and sky. The leaden clouds almost rested on her topmost masts, as if to press her down into the boiling deep; the storm-

spirits howled above her—the waves answered the roar from beneath. And in the ship there was one faint, wailing cry, which made that wild chorus the birth-hymn of a human soul.

The mother, the young mother of an hour, lay unconscious of all the turmoil around her. With the Angel of Birth came the Angel of Death; already the shadow of his wings was upon her. The Viking sat at her feet, stern, immoveable. Perhaps he now felt how it was that the fair southern flower, stolen and forcibly planted on a cold northern rock, had withered so soon. He sat with his gray head resting on his rough, wrinkled hands, his blue eyes, beneath their shaggy brows, looking with an iron-bound, tearless, terrible grief, upon the death-white face of his young spouse.

The nurse laid the babe on a silken cushion at his feet.

“Let my lord look upon his son, his heir. This is a joyful day for the noble Jarl Hjalmar. Praise be to Odin! ah, it is a blessed day!”

The Viking’s eye turned to the child, then back again to the mother, and a slight quivering agitated the stern lips.

“A blessed day, Ulva, sayest thou, and she——?”

A gesture half of scorn, and half of hatred, showed how the Norsewoman felt towards the desolate southern maid who had become the Viking’s bride. Ulva expressed, in the metaphorical poetry of her country, what she dared not say in plain language.

“There was a poor, frail, southern flower, and under

the shadow of its leaves sprang up a seedling pine. What mattered it that the flower withered, when the noble pine grew? Was it not glory enough to have sheltered the young seed, and then died? What was the weak southern plant, compared to the stately tree—the glory of the North? Let it perish! Why should my lord mourn?”

At this moment a low wail burst from the new-born babe. The sound seemed to pierce like an arrow of light through the mist of death-slumber that was fast shrouding the young mother. Her marble fingers fluttered, her eyes opened, and turned with an imploring gaze towards the nurse, who had taken in her arms the moaning child.

“She asks for the babe—give it,” muttered the father.

But the hard, rigid features of Ulva showed no pity.

“I guard my lord’s child,” she said; “his young life must not be perilled by the touch of death.”

The mother’s eyes wandered towards her husband with a mute, agonized entreaty, that went to his heart.

“Give *me* the child,” his strong voice thundered, unmindful of the terror which convulsed every limb of the dying woman. He laid the babe on her breast, already cold, and guided the feeble hands, until they wrapped it round in a close embrace.

“Now, Clotilde, what wouldst thou?—speak!” he said, and his voice grew strangely gentle.

Then the strength of a mother’s heart conquered

even death for a time. The Jarl's wife looked in her lord's face, and spoke faintly.

"Ulva said truly—I die. It was not for me to see again my sunny land. But my lord was kind to bear me thither once more, though it is too late. I had rather sleep under the soft billows that wash against these shores, than lie beneath the northern snows; they have frozen my heart. Not even thou canst warm it, my babe, my little babe!"

The Viking listened without reply. His face was turned away, but his muscular hands were clenched until the blue veins rose up like knots. At that moment he saw before him in fancy a young captive maiden, who knelt at his feet, and clasped his robe, praying that he would send her back to her southern home. Then he beheld a pale woman, the wife of a noble Jarl, with the distinctive chain on her neck, a golden-fettered slave. Both wore the same face, though hardly so white and calm, as the one that had drooped over the young babe, with the mournful lament—"They have frozen my heart! They have frozen my heart!"

And Hjalmar felt that he had bestowed the Jarl's coronet and the nuptial ring with a hand little less guilty than if it had been a murderer's.

"Clotilde," whispered he, "thou and I shall never meet more—in life or after. Thou goest to the Christian heaven—I shall drink mead in the Valhalla of my fathers. Before we part, forgive me if I did thee wrong, and say if there is any token by which I may prove that I repent."

The dying mother's eyes wandered from her child to its father, and there was in them less of fear, and more of love than he had ever seen.

"Hialmar," she murmured, "I forgive—forgive me, too. Perhaps I might have striven more to love thee; but the dove could not live in the sea-eagle's nest. It is best to die. I have only one prayer—Take my babe with thee to my own land; let him stay there in his frail childhood, and betroth him there to some bride who will make his nature gentle, that he may not regard with the pride and scorn of his northern blood, the mother to whom his birth was death."

"I promise," said the Viking; and he lifted his sword to swear by.

"Not that; not that!" cried the young mother, as with a desperate energy she half rose from her bed. "I see blood upon it—my father's and my brethren's. O God, not that!"

A superstitious fear seemed to strike like ice through the Jarl's iron frame. He laid down the sword, and took in his giant palm the tiny hand of the babe.

"This child shall be a token between us," he said, hoarsely. "I swear by thy son and mine to do all thou askest. Clotilde, die in peace."

But the blessing was wafted after an already parted soul.

Ulva started up from the corner where she had crouched and took the child. As she did so, she felt on its neck a little silver cross, which the expiring mother had secretly contrived to place there—the only

baptism Clotilde could give her babe. Ulva snatched it away, and trampled on it.

“He is all Norse now, true son of the Vikingir. Great Odin! dry up in his young veins every drop of the accursed stranger’s blood, and make him wholly the child of Hialmar!”

* * * * *

Another birth-scene. It was among the vine-covered plains of France, where, at the foot of a feudal castle, the limpid Garonne flowed. All was mirth, and sunshine, and song, within and without. Of Charlemagne’s knights, there was none braver than Sir Loys of Aveyran. And he was rich, too; his vineyards lay far and wide, outspread to the glowing sun of southern France—so that the minstrels who came to celebrate the approaching birth, had good reason to hail the heir of Sir Loys of Aveyran. An heir it must be, all felt certain, for the knight had already a goodly train of four daughters, and orisons innumerable had been put up to the Virgin and all the saints, that the next child might be a son.

It must be a son—for the old nurse of Sir Loys, a strange woman, who, almost dead to this world, was said to peer dimly into the world beyond, had seen a vision of a young armed warrior climbing snow-covered hills, leading by the hand a fair, spirit-like maiden, while the twain between them bore a golden cross, the device of Sir Loys; and the mother-expectant had dreamed of a beautiful boy’s face, with clustering amber hair, and beside it appeared another less fair,

but more feminine—until at last both faded, and fading, seemed to blend into one. Thereupon the nurse interpreted the two visions as signifying that at the same time would be born, in some distant land, a future bride for the heir.

At last, just after sunset, a light arose in the turret window—a signal to the assembled watchers that one more being was added to earth. The child was born.

Strange and solemn birth-hour, when God breathes into flesh a new spark of his divinity, and makes unto himself another human soul! A soul, it may be, so great, so pure, so glorious, that the whole world acknowledges it to come from God; or, even not confessing, is swayed by it as by a portion of the divine essence. Mysterious instant of a new creation—a creation greater than that of a material world!

The shouts rose up from the valleys, the joy-fires blazed on the hills, when the light in the turret was suddenly seen to disappear. It had been dashed down by the hand of Sir Loys, in rage that Heaven had only granted him a daughter. Poor unwelcome little wailer! whose birth brought no glad pride to the father's eye, no smile even to the mother's pale lips. The attendants hardly dared to glance at the helpless innocent, who lay uncared-for and unregarded. All trembled at the stormy passions of the knight, and stealing away, left the babe alone. Then Ulrika, the old German nurse, came and stood before her foster-son, with his little daughter in her arms.

“Sir Loys,” she said, “God has sent thee one more jewel to keep; give unto it the token of joyful acceptance, the father’s kiss.”

But Sir Loys turned away in bitter wrath.

“It is no treasure; it is a burthen—a curse! Woman, what were all thy dreams worth? Where is the noble boy which thou and the Lady Aveyran saw? Fools that ye were! And I, too, to believe in such dreaming.”

There came a wondrous dignity to the German woman’s small, spare, age-bent form, and a wild enthusiasm kindled in her still lustrous eyes.

“Shamed be the lips of the Knight of Aveyran, when such words come from them! The dreams which Heaven sends, Heaven will fulfil. Dare not thou to cast contempt on this young bud, fresh from the hands of angels, which Heaven can cause to open into a goodly flower. Doubt not, Sir Loys, the dream will yet come true.”

The knight laughed derisively, and was about to leave the apartment; but Ulrika stood in his way. With one arm she held the little one close to her breast—the other she raised with imperious gesture, that formed a strange contrast to her shrunken, diminutive figure. The knight, strong and stalwart as he was, might have crushed her like a worm on his pathway, and yet he seemed to quail before the indomitable and almost supernatural resolve that shone in her eyes.

“Ulrika, I have spoken—take away the child, and

let me go," he said; and his tones sounded more like entreaty than command.

But the woman still confronted him with her imperious eyes, beneath which his own sank in confusion. She—that frail creature, who seemed to need but a breath from death's icy lips to plunge her into the already open tomb—she ruled him as mind rules matter, as the soul commands the body. Loys of Aveyran, the bravest of Charlemagne's knights, was like a child before her.

"What wouldst thou, Ulrika?" he said at last.

She pointed to the babe, and, obeying her imperative gesture, the father stooped down, and signed its forehead with the sign of the cross. At the touch of the mailed fingers, the little one lifted up its voice in a half-subdued cry.

"Ave Mary!" said the knight, in disgust; "it is a puny, wailing imp. If Heaven has, indeed, sent it, Heaven may take it back again—for there are daughters enough in the house of Aveyran. This one shall be a nun—'tis fit for nothing else."

"Shame on thee, sacrilegious man!" cried Ulrika, indignantly.

But the knight left her more swiftly than ever he had fled from a foe. The aged nurse threw herself on her knees before a rude image of the Virgin, at whose feet she laid the child.

"Holy Mother," she prayed, "let not the dreams and visions of the night be unfulfilled. I believe them—I only of all this house. For my faith's

sake, give to this innocent that glorious destiny which, with prophetic eye, I saw. The world casteth her out—take her, O Mother, into thy sacred arms, and make her pure, meek, and holy like thyself. I go the way of all the earth; but thou, O Blessed One, into thy arms I give this maid.”

When Ulrika rose up, she saw that her petition had not been offered in solitude. Another person had entered the turret chamber. It was a young man—the counterpart of herself in the small, spare form, yellow face, and wild, dark eyes. He wore a dress half lay, half clerical, and his whole appearance was that of one immersed in deep studies, and almost oblivious of the ordinary affairs of life.

“Mother, is that the child?” he said, abruptly.

“Well, son, and hast thou also come to cast shame on this poor, unwelcome one, like the man who has just gone from hence?—I blush to say, thy foster-brother and thy lord,” was the stern answer of Ulrika.

The student knelt on one knee, and took gently the baby-hand that peeped out of the purple mantle prepared for the heir. He examined it long and eagerly.

“One may see the flower’s form in the bud, and I might perhaps trace the lines even now,” he said. “Ah! there it is—even as I read in the stars—a noble nature—a life destined for some great end. Yet these crosses—it is a fate strange and solemn, but not sad. And some aspects of her birth are the same as in mine own. Most marvellous!”

Ulrika drew away the child, and sighed.

“Ah! my son—my noble Ansgarius—wilt thou still go on with thy unearthly lore! It is not meet for one to whom holy Church has long opened her bosom. My child—my only one—I would fain see thee less learned, and more pious. What art thou now muttering over this babe—some of thy secrets about the stars? All—all are vanity!”

“Mother,” said Ansgarius, sternly, “thou believest in thy dreams and revelations from heaven—I in my science. Let neither judge the other harshly, for the world outside cruelly judges both.”

And he went on with his earnest examination of the child’s palm, occasionally moving to the turret window to look out on the sky, now all glittering with stars, and then again consulting the tablets that he always carried in his girdle.

Ulrika watched him with a steady and mournful gaze, which softened into mother-love her fierce eyes. She sat, or rather crouched, at the foot of the Virgin’s niche, with the babe asleep on her knees. Her lean, yellow fingers ran over the beads of her rosary, and her lips moved silently.

“Mother,” said Ansgarius, suddenly, “what art thou doing there!”

“Praying for thee, my son,” she answered—“praying that these devices lead thee not astray, and that thou mayst find at last the true wisdom.”

“I want it not—I believe but what I know and have proved. It was thy will which clad me in this

priest's cassock. I opposed it not, but I will seek God in my own way. I will climb to His heaven by the might of knowledge—that alone will make me like unto Him.”

Ulrika turned away from her son.

“And it was to this man—this proud, self-glorifier—that I would fain have confided the pure young soul this night sent upon the earth! No! Son of my bosom—my life's care—may the Merciful-one be long-suffering with thee until the change in thy spirit come! And this worse than orphan babe, O Mother of consolation, I lay at thy feet, with the last orison of a life spent in prayers. For this new human soul, accept the offering of that which now comes to thee.”

Ulrika's latter words were faint and indistinct, and her head leaned heavily against the feet of the image. Her son, absorbed in his pursuits, neither saw nor heard. Suddenly she arose, stood upright, and cried with a loud, clear, joyful voice—

“It will come, that glory!—I see it now—the golden cross she bears upon the hills of snow! There are footsteps before her—they are thine, son of my hopes—child of my long-enduring faith! Ansgarius—my Ansgarius—thou art the blessed—the chosen one!”

Her voice failed suddenly, and she sank, on bended knees, at the feet of the Virgin. Ansgarius, startled, lifted up her head, so that the lamp-light illumined her face.—The son looked on his dead mother.

CHAPTER II.

LET us pass over a few years, before we stand once more in the gray towers of Aveyran.

It was a feast, for Sir Loys was entertaining a strange guest—an old man, who came unattended and unaccompanied, save by a child and its nurse. He had claimed rather than implored hospitality; and though he came in such humble guise, there was a nobility in his bearing which impressed the knight with perfect faith in his truth, even when the wanderer declared his rank to be equal with that of Sir Loys himself.

“Who I am and what I seek, I will reveal ere I depart,” abruptly said the stranger; and with the chivalrous courtesy of old the host sought to know no more, but bade him welcome to Aveyran.

The old man sat at the board, stern and grave, and immoveable as a statue; but his little son ran hither and thither, and played with the knight’s wife and her maidens, who praised his fair silken hair, his childish beauty, and his fearless confidence. But wherever he moved, there followed him continually the cold, piercing eyes of his nurse, a tall woman, whose dress was foreign, and who never uttered a word, save in a tongue which sounded strange and harsh in the musical ears of the Provençals.

The feast over, the guest arose, and addressed the knight of Aveyran,—

“Sir Loys, for the welcome and good cheer thou has given, receive the thanks of Hialmar Jarl, chief of all the Vikings of the north.”

At this name, once the terror of half of Europe, the knight made a gesture of surprise, and a thrill of apprehension ran through the hall. Hialmar saw it, and a proud smile bent his lips.

“Children of the south, ye need not fear, though the sea-eagle is in your very nest; he is old and gray, his talons are weak now,” said the Jarl, adopting the metaphorical name which had been given him in former times, and which was his boast still.

“Hialmar is welcome; we fear no enemy in a guest and a stranger,” answered Sir Loys. “Let the noble Jarl say on.”

The Viking continued,—

“I have vowed to take for my son a southern bride. Throughout Europe, I have found no nest in which the young eagle could mate. Sir Loys of Aveyran, they art noble and courteous: thou hast many fair daughters; give me one, that I may betroth her unto my son.”

At this sudden proposition, Sir Loys looked aghast, and the Lady of Aveyran uttered a suppressed shriek; for the Vikings were universally regarded with terror, as barbarous heathens; and many were the legends of young maidens carried off by them with a short and rough wooing.

Hialmar glanced at the terror-stricken faces around, and his own grew dark with anger.

"Is there here any craven son of France who dares despise a union with the mighty line of Hialmar?" he cried, threateningly. "The ship of the Viking rides on the near seas, and the sea-eagle will make his talons strong, and his pinions broad, yet."

Sir Loys half drew his sword, and then replaced it. He was too true a knight to show discourtesy to an aged and unarmed guest.

"Hialmar," he answered, calmly, "thy words are somewhat free; but mine shall remember thy gray hairs. Thou seest my four daughters; I cannot give one as thy son's bride, seeing they are already betrothed after the fashion of our country; and a good knight's pledge is never broken."

"And are there no more of the line of Aveyran?" inquired Hialmar.

Sir Loys was about to reply, when, from a side-table that had been spread with meagre, lenten fare, contrasting with the plenty-laden board, there rose up a man in a monk's dress. From under the close cowl two piercing eyes confronted the Lord of Aveyran. They seemed to force truth from his lips against his will.

"I have one child more," he said, "a poor, worthless plant, but she is to be a vowed nun. Why dost thou gaze at me so strangely, Father Ansgarius?" added the knight, uneasily. "Ulrika—Heaven rest her soul!" and he crossed himself—"thy mother Ulrika seems to look at me from thine eyes."

"Even so," said the monk, in a low tone. "Then,

Loys of Aveyran, hear her voice from my lips. I see in the words of this strange guest the working of Heaven's will. Do thou dispute it not. Send for the child Hermolin."

The knight's loud laugh rang out as scornfully as years before in the little turret-chamber.

"What!" said he, though he took courteous care the words should not reach Hialmar's ears, "am I to be swayed hither and thither by old women's dreams and priestly prophecies? I thought it was by thy consent, good father, that she was to become a nun, and now thou sayest she shall wed this young whelp of a northern bear."

Ansgarius replied not to this contemptuous speech, but his commanding eyes met the knight's; and once again the bold Sir Loys grew humble; as if the dead Ulrika's soul had passed into that of her son, so as to sway her foster-child still.

"It is a strange thing for a servant of Holy Church to strive to break a vow, especially one which devotes a child to the Virgin. I dare not do so great a sin!" faintly argued the Lord of Aveyran.

But it seemed as though the cloudy, false subterfuge with which the knight had veiled his meaning fell off, pierced through and through by the lightning of those truth-penetrating eyes. Sir Loys reddened to the very brow, with confusion as much as with anger.

"Isabelle," he muttered, "desire one of thy maidens to bring hither our youngest child."

The meek Lady of Aveyran had never a word of opposition to any of her lord's behests. She only lifted up her placid eyes in astonishment at this unusual command, and obeyed it.

Hermolin was brought, trembling, weeping, too terrified even to struggle. It was a sad image of childhood, when a gleam of unwonted kindness and love seemed to strike almost with fear the poor desolate little heart, accustomed only to a gloomy life of coldness and neglect. For the dislike, almost hatred, that fell like a shadow on her unwelcome birth, had gathered deeper and darker over the lonely child. No father's smile, no mother's caresses, were her portion. Shut out from the sunshine of love, the young plant grew up frail, wan, feeble, without beauty or brightness. No one ever heard from Hermolin's lips the glad laughter of infancy: among her sisters, she seemed like a shadow in the midst of their brightness. As she stood in the doorway, cowering under the robe of her conductor, her thin hands hiding her pale face, so unlike a child's in its sharp outline, and her large, restless eyes glancing in terror on all before her, the Norsewoman's freezing gaze was the first turned towards her.

"By Odin! and it is such poor, worthless gifts as this that the Christians offer to their gods!" she muttered, in her own language.

"What are they saying, Ulva?" sharply asked the Viking.

"Nothing, my lord," she answered, submissively,

“but that the young Olof has at last found himself a bride. Look there.”

The noble boy, whose fearless, frank, and generous spirit even now shone out, had darted forward, and now, with his arms clasped round Hermolin's neck, was soothing her fears, and trying to encourage her with childish caresses. The little girl understood not a word of his strange Norse tongue, but the tones were gentle and loving. She looked up at the sweet young face that bent over her, half wondering at something which seemed new to her in the blue eyes and bright golden hair. Twining her fingers in one of Olof's abundant locks, she compared it with one of her own dark curls, laughed a low musical laugh, and finally, reassured, put up her little mouth to kiss him, in perfect confidence. Olof, proud of his success, led the little maiden through the room, amidst many a covert smile and jest.

But when the two children came near Sir Loys, Hermolin shrank back, and clung weeping to Olof's breast. There was no love in the father's heart, but there was much of pride and bitterness. The child's instinctive terror proclaimed aloud all the secrets of her cheerless life: it angered him beyond endurance. He clenched his gauntleted hands, and though he strove to make his tone calm as became a right courteous knight, yet there was in it somewhat of wrathful sarcasm, as he addressed his guest.

“Jarl Hialmar, there stands my youngest child—though her looks would seem to belie the noble blood

she owns. Heaven may take her—or thou; I care little which, so as I am no more burthened with a jewel I covet not.”

The Norseman eyed with curiosity and doubt the frail, trembling child, who stood still enshielded by Olof’s arms. It might be that his boy’s love drew also the father’s pity towards the little Hermolin; or perchance, the sorrowful, imploring look of those brown eyes, brought back the memory of others which long ago had drooped in darkness—the darkness of a life without love. The Jarl’s face wore a kind expression when he beheld Hermolin; she felt it, and trembled not when Olof led her to his father’s knees.

Hialmar, still irresolute, turned to the nurse, who stood behind, watching every movement of her foster-son.

“Ulva,” he said, in his Norse language, “thou hast been faithful even as a mother to thy lord’s child. What sayest thou, shall we take this poor unloved babe as a bride for the last of the race of Hialmar?”

Ulva’s cold eyes regarded Hermolin; they wandered with jealous eagerness over the slight drooping form; the white, thin arms, that seemed wasting away like the last snow-wreaths of winter; the quick-flitting roses, that deepened and faded momentarily on the marble cheek. And she said in her heart,—

“It is well; death will come before the bridal; and then, the vow fulfilled, Olof shall take a northern maiden to his bosom, and the footstep of the stranger shall not defile the halls of his fathers.”

Then Ulva bent humbly before the Viking, saying aloud,—

“My lips are not worthy to utter their desire; but has not the young Olof himself chosen? The great Odin sometimes speaks his will by the lips of babes, as well as by those of aged seers. It may be so now.”

“It shall be!” cried Hjalmar. “Sir Loys, I take thy daughter to be mine, according as thou saidst. Thy church must seek another nun; for Hermolin shall be Olof’s bride.”

So saying, he enclosed both the children in his embrace, at which young Olof laughed, and clapped his hands, while the little Hermolin, half afraid, half wondering, only looked in the boy’s bright face, and her own was lit up with confidence and joy. So, during the whole ceremony of betrothal, the baby-bride still seemed to draw courage and gladness from the fearless smile of her boy-lover, never removing her gaze from that sweet countenance which had thus dawned upon her, the first love-sunshine her young life had ever known.

When Olof was parted from his childish spouse, she clung to him with a despairing energy, almost terrible in one so young. He called her by the name they had taught him to use towards her, and which he uttered, and she heard; both how unconscious of the solemn life-bond it implied. Yet still it appeared to have a soothing influence; her tears ceased, and her delicate frame was no longer convulsed with grief. She lay in his arms, still and composed. But at that moment

there bent over them a tall, dark shadow ; it seemed to the child's vivid imagination one of those evil spectral forms of which she had heard—and Ulva interposed her strong grasp. The last sight that Hermolin saw was not the beaming face, already so fondly beloved, of her young bridegroom, but the countenance of the Norsewoman, the gloomy, threatening brow, and the white teeth glittering in a yet more fearful smile. No wonder that, years after, it haunted the child, coming between her and the sunny image which from that time ever visited her dreams, less like a reality than an angel from the unknown world.

CHAPTER III.

BENEATH the shadow of her convent walls, the child Hermolin grew up. Her world was not that of her kindred : between her and them a line of separation was drawn that might not be crossed. She lived all alone. This was the destiny of her childhood and dawning youth. It was her father's will : she knew it, and murmured not. She lifted up to heaven those affections which she was forbidden to indulge on earth ; and when she came to the Virgin's feet, her prayers and her love were less those of a devotee to a saint, than those of a child whose heart yearned towards a mother. She spent in vague reveries that fancy which might have brightened home ; and for brother and sister-love, her heart gathered its every tendril around

the remembered image, which, star-like, had risen on her early childhood. The image was that of Olof. They had told her that she was betrothed, that he alone of all the world laid claim to her; and though she understood not the tie, nor the fulfilment that might come one day, still she clung to it as to some strange blessedness that had been and would be again, of which the bright beautiful face, with its golden-shadowing hair, was a remembrance and an augury. Once, in a picture of St. John—rude, yet most wonderful to her—the child fancied the limned head bore a likeness to this dream-image, and from that time it was impressed more firmly on her imagination. It mingled strangely with her vows, her prayers, and above all with her thoughts of the future, over which such mystery hung.

Hermolin knew that she had been devoted to the service of Heaven. From her convent she beheld the distant towers of Aveyran: she saw the festive train that carried away her eldest sister a bride; she heard from over the plains the dull lament which told of her unseen mother's death; she joined the vespers for the departed soul. But all those tokens of the outside world were to her only phantasms. Far above them all, and looking down upon them as a star looks down on the unquiet earth, dwelt Hermolin.

Yet she knew that it would not be always so. The nuns regarded her as set apart, and not one of themselves. Round her neck she wore strung the betrothal ring, which, as day by day her small childish

hand grew to maiden roundness, she used to draw on, in a mood too earnest to be mere sport, wondering how soon the finger would fit the token, and with that, what strange change would come. And as her childhood passed by, Hermolin began to see a deeper meaning in the exhortations of one she loved dearest in the world—the monk who had been her confessor, friend, and counsellor all her life—Father Ansgarius.

There had come a change over the son of Ulrika. Who can tell how strong is a mother's prayer? The answering joy which her life could not attain to, was given to her death. After then Ansgarius believed. He believed, not with the arid, lifeless faith of an assenting intellect, but the full deep earnestness of a heart which takes into itself God's image, and is all-penetrated with the sunshine of His presence. The learned man saw that there was a humility higher than all his learning—that which made him cry out even as a little child, "O thou All-wise, teach *me!* O thou All-merciful, love *me!*"

Thus a spirit, strong as a man's and gentle as a woman's, guided the early years of Hermolin, the child of prayers. And so it is: God ever answers these heart-beseechings, though not always in the manner we will it—even as the moisture which rises up to heaven in soft dew sometimes falls down in rain; but it surely does fall, and where earth most needs it. Gradually, as the child was nurtured in peace and holiness, Ansgarius unfolded her future mission, in which he believed with all the earnestness that singles

out from the rest of mankind the true apostle—the *man sent*.

Hermolin listened humbly, reverently, joyfully. The story of Ulrika's dream impressed itself with a vivid power, from which her whole mind took its colouring. And deeper, stronger, more engrossing became her worship of that golden-haired angel-youth, who, with her, was to bear unto the snow-mountains the holy cross. She had no thought of human love: in her mind, Olof was only an incarnation of the saint before whose likeness she daily prayed; who would come one day, and lead her on her life's journey, to fulfil the destiny of which Ansgarius spoke. But when, as years passed, her womanhood expanded leaf by leaf, like the bud of a rose to which every day there comes a deeper colour and a lovelier form, Hermolin was conscious of a new want. It was not enough that the beloved ideal should haunt her thoughts, and look on her in her slumbers. Hermolin had need of a more human and answering love. In all that she saw of the world's beauty—in all the new, glad feelings which overflowed her heart, she longed for some dear eyes to look into—some dear hand to press—that her deep happiness might not waste itself unshared. Looking out from her bower in the convent garden, she sometimes saw in the twilight young lovers wandering along the green hillside, singing their Provençal lays, or sitting side by side in silence which is to the glad outburst of love what the night, with her star-lit quiet and

her deep pulses—beating all the fuller for that mysterious stillness—is to the sunny, open, all-rejoicing day. And then Hermolin's bosom thrilled with an unwonted emotion; and she thought how strange and beautiful must be that double life, when each twin-heart says to the other, "I am not mine own, but thine,—nay, I am not thine, but thyself—a part of thee!"

But all these fancies Hermolin folded up closely in her maiden bosom, though she knew not why she did so. And even when the time came that the token-ring fitted her finger, she still lived her pure and peaceful life, awaiting the perfecting of that destiny which she believed was to come.

At last, on a day when it was not his wont to visit the convent, Ansgarius appeared. He found the young maiden sitting at her embroidery beneath the picture which was her delight. Often the gaudy work fell from her hands, while she looked up at the face of St. John that seemed to watch over her.

Ansgarius came and stood beside his young pupil. His motions were restless, and his eyes wandering; and there was an unquiet tremulousness in his voice, which spoke more of the jarring world without, than of the subdued peace which ever abided within the convent walls. Hermolin was seized with a like uneasiness.

"My father," she said—for she had long since learned to give that title to her only friend—"my father, what is it that troubles thee?"

"I might say the same to thee, dear child; for thy cheek is flushed, and thine eye bright," the monk answered, evasively.

"I know not why, but my heart is not at rest," Hermolin said. "I feel a vague expectation, as if there were a voice calling me that I must answer, and arise and go."

The face of Ansgarius was lighted up with enthusiasm.

"It is the power of the Virgin upon the child," he murmured. "The time is at hand! My daughter, wait," he said more calmly; "if the call be Heaven's, thou canst not but follow at Heaven's good pleasure."

"I will," said Hermolin, meekly; and she folded her hands upon her bosom, while her confessor gave her the benediction.

"And now, my child, I have somewhat to say to thee; wilt thou listen?"

"Yes, here, my father," she answered, seating herself at his feet, while her fingers played with a coarse rosary of wooden beads, which she had worn all her life. After a long silence, it caught the eye of the monk, and he burst forth—

"Child, child, dare not to make a toy of that holy relic; never look at it but with prayers. Remember whose dying fingers once closed over it—on whose cold breast it once lay—ay, together with thee!"

"I remember," said Hermolin, softly. "Forgive me, O father; forgive me—blessed soul of Ulrika!"

and, kissing the crucifix, she raised her pure eyes to heaven.

“Amen!” said Ansgarius, devoutly. “And, O mother! strengthen me to tell this child of the past and the future—mine and hers.”

He remained silent for a little, and then said, suddenly—*

“Hermolin, thou knowest what she was, and how she died. Listen while I speak, not of her, the blessed one! but of myself, and my sin. I lived in darkness, I scorned the light, until it burst upon me with the brightness which her soul shed from its glorious wings when it rose to God. On the night she died, I lay down, and dreamed I walked along a road all foul, and strewed with briars and thorns. Then came a vision; it was the pearl of earthly mothers, Mary. She showed me a bright pathway on which moved glorious angels, like women in countenance. One face was that which had bent over my childhood, youth, and manhood, with untiring love—my mother Ulrika! I sprang forward with a yearning heart; but the vision stood between us, and I heard a voice saying, ‘Son, thou canst never come to thy mother till thy feet are no longer defiled. Leave that thorny way, and ascend to the heavenly road.’ Then I awoke, and knew what my sin had been. O mother-saint, pray for me in heaven, that it may not be laid to my charge.”

The monk sighed heavily, and bent down his head,

* For this incident in the life of Ansgarius, see the “History of Sweden,” translated by Mary Howitt.

already thickly strewn with the snow of age. Then Hermolin stood up, and her face was as that of a young saint, resplendent with the inward shining of her pure, heaven-kindled soul ; and she said, in a tone like one inspired,—

“ God and thy mother have forgiven thee, since thou hast done the will of both towards me. If, as thou hast said, I must go forth at Heaven’s bidding, for a life to be spent in working that holy will, all men, and the angels that wait on men, shall behold that it is thy word I speak—it is thy spirit which dwells in me.”

Ansgarius looked amazed, for never before had the maiden given such utterance to the thoughts which pervaded her whole life. Again he murmured, “ The time is near.” But even while he regarded her, another change seemed to come over the fitful spirit of Hermolin. She sank at the monk’s feet, and bathed them with a shower of tears.

“ O father, guide me,” she wept : “ I am not as I was ; there is a change—I feel it in my heart, and I tremble.”

“ It is the shadow of thy coming fate, my child,” said Ansgarius, solemnly. “ Know, thy bridegroom is at hand.”

Hermolin sprang up with a wild gesture of joy.

“ Olof!—Olof! Is Olof here?” she cried.

And then, with an instinctive impulse of maidenly shamefacedness, she drooped her head, and hid her burning cheeks under the novice’s veil she wore.

Ansgarius continued :—“ A ship lies at the river’s

mouth, and from the towers of Aveyran I saw a train winding across the plain. It must be that of the son of Hialmar. Nay, why art thou trembling, child? Dost thou shrink from thy destiny—thou, the chosen of the Virgin, whom I have reared up to this end with daily and nightly prayers?"

But the ascetic monk, absorbed in the one purpose of his existence, knew not the wild flutterings of that young heart, nor how at the moment Hermolin was less the devotee ready to work out her life's aim, than the timid maiden about to welcome in her betrothed the realization of a whole girlhood's dream of ideal love. Ansgarius took her by the hand, and led her to the Virgin's shrine. There, at his bidding, Hermolin, half unconscious of what she did, renewed her vows of dedication; but while she knelt, the noise of rude yet joyful music was heard, and up the hill wound a goodly train. First of all there rode one, who, to the strong frame and almost giant proportions of manhood, added the fair face of a youth. His long, sun-bright locks floated in the wind, and his eagle's plume danced above them; his eye, bold and frank, was that of one born to rule, and there was pride even in his smile. Yet, through all this change, Hermolin knew that face was the same which had been the sunshine of her childhood—the dream of her youth; and her heart leaped towards her bridegroom.

"Olof!—my Olof!" she cried, and would have flown to meet him, with the same child-like love which had poured itself forth in tears on his neck years before, in

the castle of Aveyran; but Ansgarius stood before her.

"I am little versed in the world's ways," he said; "yet it seems to me that this is scarcely the guise in which a maiden should go to meet her bridegroom;" and he glanced at the coarse nun's-dress. The words touched a new chord in the soul of the young betrothed.

Never until then had Hermolin thought whether she were beautiful or no. In her calm retirement, she heard no idle talk about maiden's charms. Day after day she attired herself in her simple robe, and felt no regret in folding up her long silken tresses under her close veil, or enveloping her slender figure in the coarse serge and thick girdle of cord. But now her heart beat with anxiety; she fled hastily away to her own chamber. There she found the aged nun who attended her, while many rich garments, such as high-born damsels wore, lay scattered about. The glistening of them dazzled and confused Hermolin's senses. She stood motionless, while the nun silently exchanged her simple robe for the new attire; and then, while she beheld herself in this unwonted guise, her courage failed, her whole frame trembled, and she wept passionately.

Hermolin felt that she was not beautiful. Another might perhaps have seen in the small, almost child-like figure, an airy grace that atoned for its want of dignity, and have traced admiringly the warm southern blood that gave richness to the clear brown skin. But Hermolin had known only one ideal of perfection; and

acknowledged no beauty that did not bear a likeness to Olof.

Soon, ringing through the convent, she heard a bold, clear voice, and the girlish weakness passed away. Love took possession of her inmost soul. When she stood before her bridegroom, she thought of herself no more—she became absorbed in him. And when young Olof, in his somewhat rough but affectionate greeting, lifted his fairy-like bride up in his strong arms, he little knew how deep and wild was the devotion of that heart which then cast itself down at his feet, to be cherished, thrown aside, or trampled on, yet loving evermore.

CHAPTER IV.

ON, gaily on, ploughing the same seas which had carried on their stormy breast the dead and the newly-born, went the ship of the young Norse chieftain. And onward to the same northern home, from beneath whose blighting shadow the dying mother had been borne, was wafted another southern bride. But it was not with Clotilde as with the wife of Hjalmar. Love, mighty, all-enduring love, made Hermolin go forth, strong and fearless. She stood on the rocking deck, with the shoreless waves before her eyes, instead of the green meads and purple vineyards of Provence, with the rude voices and wild countenances of the Viking's crew, instead of the vesper chants and the mild-faced nuns, with their noiseless, sweeping garments. But Her-

molin trembled not, for Olof was near her, and his presence lighted up her world with joy. The freezing north wind seemed to blow like a balm-scented breeze, when she met it standing by her husband's side, or leaning against his breast. She looked not once back to the sunny shore of Provence, but ever onward to the north, the strong and daring north, without fear, and in the fulness of hope, for it was Olof's land.

And he, the one, sole master of this golden mine of love, this true woman's heart, pure as rich, and rich as beautiful, how was it with him? He took it as a long-preserved possession, which came to him as a right, whose value he never troubled himself to estimate. The young heir of the Viking had heard all his life of the southern bride who awaited his pleasure to claim her. Now and then, during the few seasons of restless idleness which intervened by chance between his hunting and his war expeditions, the soft dark eyes and twining arms of a little child had crossed his memory; but Ulva, his nurse, said such remembrances were weak and womanish, and bade him drive them away with bold thoughts and active deeds, more becoming a man and the son of a Viking.

Jarl Hjalmar lived to behold his son the bravest of the young northern warriors, and then sank into the embrace of the Valkyriæ. He died in battle, one hand on his sword, and the other grasping a long lock of woman's hair. On this relic he made the son of the dead Clotilde swear, by the soul of his mother, to claim from the lord of France, either by fair words or force of

arms, his plighted bride ; and so Olof, longing for adventurous deeds in any cause, went forth with all the eagerness of youth on his quest. A little while he rejoiced in his prize, like a child toying with a precious jewel ; a little while he softened his bold, fierce nature into gentleness ; and then, looking in his face, whereon was set the seal of almost angelic beauty, Hermolin believed in the realization of all her dreams. The golden-haloed saint of her peaceful youth lived again in the beloved Olof.

And so it was, that in the fulness of this new joy, this blessed human love, Hermolin, the child vowed to the Virgin, the pious maiden of the convent became merged in Hermolin the wife of the young northern Jarl. It was less the pupil of Ansgarius, sent forth heaven-guided on her holy mission, than the passionate woman who would fain cling through life and death unto her heart's chosen. Gradually the shadow of an earthly love was gliding between her and heaven, and when it is so, ever with that soul-eclipse darkness comes.

While the ship yet rode upon the seas, Olof's mien wore less of bridegroom tenderness, and he grew chafed and restless at times. He lingered not at Hermolin's side, to listen while she spoke of her childish past, or talk to her of the future—of their northern home. He never now, in lover-like playfulness, made her teach him the almost-forgotten speech of his mother's land, or laughed when her sweet lips tried in vain to frame the harsh accents of the north. Many a time,

Hermolin stood lonely by the vessel's side, trying to recall those holy and pure thoughts which had once made a heaven of solitude. But still in the clouds to which she lifted her eyes, in the waves which dashed almost against her feet, she only saw and heard Olof's face and Olof's voice. Then she would remember the parting words of Ansgarius, when he stood watching the ship, that, as he still fervently believed, bore, dove-like, the olive-branch of a purer faith to that northern land:—

“My child,” he said, “love thy husband—worship only God.”

And, conscious of its wild idolatry, the heart of Hermolin trembled, so that it dared not even pray.

At last the vessel neared land, the sublime land of the north, with its giant snow-mountains, its dark pine-forests, its desolate plains. To the eyes of the young Provençale it seemed in its winter-bound stillness like the dead earth lying, awfully beautiful, beneath her white-folded shroud. Hermolin felt as though she stood at the entrance of the land of shadows, with its solemn gloom, its eternal silence; and yet, while she gazed, her soul was filled with rapture. She crept to the side of her young spouse, folded his hand in her bosom, and looked up timidly in his face.

“Oh, my Olof,” she whispered, “this, then, is our home—this is thy land? How beautiful it is—how grand!”

The young Jarl looked down on his fair wife, and smiled at her evident emotion, with the careless supe-

riority with which he might have regarded the vagaries of a wayward child.

"Yes," he answered, "it is a goodly land; these pine-forests are full of bears, and the sea-kings have had many a well-fought battle with the land-robbers in the defiles of the mountains. It was there that the sword of Olof was first reddened," the Jarl continued, proudly, while his lip curled and his eye dilated.

A little did Hermolin shrink, even from that beloved hand she was folding to her heart; but immediately she drew closer to him, and wound his arm around her neck.

"Do not say this, my Olof," she murmured caressingly; "let us talk rather of that glad time when there shall be no more warfare, the time of which I have often told thee, my beloved, when the golden cross shines on the white snow, and thou and I——"

But Olof silenced her with a burst of half-derisive laughter. "Not I, my fair wife, not I. Thou mayst dream among thy pretty toys, thy crosses and rosaries; such playthings are fit for women and children, but the son of Hialmar trusts to the faith of his fathers. Do as thou wilt, little one, only let me handle the hunting-spear, and guide the ship, and drain the mead-cups. Odin loves the bold arm of a warrior better than the puling lips of a saint; and the blood of an enemy is more precious in his sight than a thousand whining prayers. But see, there are my good soldiers awaiting us. Hark! their shout of welcome. Verily, I am glad to see again my father's land!"

And the young Viking stood on his vessel's deck, magnificent in his proud and fearless beauty, acknowledging his follower's acclaims, as they rang through the still winter air. He saw not that his bride had shrunk away from his side, to where none could witness her. Her eyes wandered from the ghost-like mountains to the cold, clear, frosty sky, but the solemn beauty of the scene was gone—all was desolation now. It seemed to her a world on which the light of heaven and life-giving smile had never shone—a world where all was coldness, and silence, and death; and in it she stood alone—alone.

Hermolin neither wept nor struggled. There was no anger in her heart. She looked at Olof where he stood, the very ideal of manhood, in all things resembling the dream-image of so many years. She clung to it, and to him, with an intensity that made her love seem almost terrible in its strength. And thus, while she thought of her life to come, Hermolin dreaded less the discovery of his heart's change, than the faithfulness that would make enduring sorrow the portion of her own.

“I love him,” she moaned, “through all that is—in spite of all that may be—I love him! Olof, my noble, my beautiful; the light of my life! O God! have mercy—have mercy on me!”

CHAPTER V.

BE still, O north wind ! howl not at the iron-bound lattice ; she hears not thee. Blinding snow, sweep not in such mad gusts over the mountains ; thou canst not freeze her heart more than its inward anguish. If Hermolin dwelt among the rose-bowers of Provence, instead of the chill, ghostly halls of the Viking, there would be the same icy burden on her soul—the same dark shadow over all things on which her eyes look. The heart makes its own sunshine—its own eternal gloom.

The Jarl's bride was alone. Even that day he had left her on the threshold of the palace, and the envious eyes of the wondering Norse handmaidens had been the only welcome in her husband's halls. Through those halls she glided like a wandering spirit, shrinking from their ghastly grandeur, which filled her young soul with fear. The white-tusked spoils of the bear-hunters seemed to grin like evil spirits from the walls ; and as she passed by the empty armour of many a departed Viking, spectral shapes appeared to creep within it, until beneath the vacant helm glittered fiery eyes, and shadowy hands formed themselves out of the air, wielding the ungrasped spear. Hermolin shivered with terror ; her limbs moved heavily ; her eyes dared not lift themselves from the ground.

One sun-gleam from that bright, beloved face, and

the horrible phantoms would have fled. But it came not. Hermolin reached her chamber, and was alone. Ringing through the long corridor she heard the laughter of her retreating maiden-train; she listened while they mocked at the terrors of the Jarl's young bride, and said how much fitter had been a fearless Norse maiden than a poor shrinking child of the south, to tread the halls of the son of Hialmar.

Hermolin's cheek flushed, and her terror changed to pride—not for herself, but for him.

“They shall never say the wife of Olof is afraid. I will be strong—I will teach my heart to beat as with the bold northern blood. My Olof, thou shalt not blush for me.”

But still the young cheek blanched at the shrieks which seemed to mingle in the tempestuous blast, and still, when the blazing faggots cast fantastic shapes on the walls, Hermolin started and trembled. Hour after hour passed, and Olof came not. Her fears melted into sorrow, and she poured forth the tears of an aching and lonely heart.

Wild storm of the north, howl over that poor broken flower! but thou canst not wither the life-fluid which will yet make its leaves green, and its blossoms fair—the essence of its being—its hope, its strength, its enduring Love.

Still, as ever, alone, Hermolin retraced the gloomy halls; gliding, like a spirit of light come to re-animate the dead, past the mailed forms that kept memorial watch over the Viking's halls, with her faint

gleaming lamp, and her floating hair, which every blast seemed to lift with a spirit hand.

Led by the distant sound of voices, Hermolin came to the festival hall. Her terror-stricken fancy had pictured Olof in the storm; his stalwart frame paralyzed; his gold hair mingling with the snow-wreaths, and death—a terrible death—stealing over him. But as she stood in the dark entrance, Hermolin saw her lord. He sat among his young warriors, the blithest of all, quaffing cup after cup of sparkling mead, his laugh ringing loud, but still musical; and his beautiful face resplendent with mirth and festivity.

But for the first time its sunshine fell on Hermolin in vain. There was a deadly coldness at her heart which no power could take away. Her lips murmured a thanksgiving that Olof was safe; but no smile sealed the joyful amen of the orison. Silently as she came, she glided away, and the sinner knew not how near him, yet all unregarded, had passed the good angel.

When Hermolin re-entered her chamber, there rose up from one corner a dark figure—a woman, not yet aged, but with iron-gray locks and deeply-furrowed brow. Suddenly as the thought of a terrible dream gone by, that wild face, those piercing eyes, rushed upon Hermolin's memory. It was the remembrance which had been the haunting terror of her childhood—the face of Ulva.

The nurse bent in a half-mocking courtesy to Olof's wife.

“Welcome, my lady from the south, to her new dwelling! Perchance she likes it not; but is too late to repent now.”

“My lord’s home is ever pleasant in his wife’s eyes,” answered Hermolin, striving to impart strength and dignity to her trembling frame.

“It is well,” said the nurse. “But the southern lady should know that it is not our custom for the wife of a noble Jarl to steal like a thief about the halls at night. Also, that the northern heroes admit no women to their feasts. The young Olof’s eyes had darted angry lightnings, had he known his bride intruded so near.”

Hermolin shrunk from the loud and fierce tones of the Norsewoman. But while pressing her clasped hands on her breast, she felt Ulrika’s cross. It gave her strength; for it carried her thoughts back from the desolate present to the pure and holy past; and from the remembered convent-shrine lifted them up heavenwards, as prayers. Then she turned to Ulva, and said—

“I am a stranger, and I know thee not. But I love my lord, and all that are his; therefore I forgive these discourteous words to Olof’s wife.”

As a spirit of evil steals from the light, so Ulva crept from the presence of Hermolin, and the young wife was once more alone.

No, not alone, though she sank prostrate on the floor, and laid her brow on the cold stone, not even a silent lifting up of the eyes showing whither the heart

fled in its desolation. That stone was a Bethel-pillow, and there the angel-winged prayers and angel-footed blessings ascended and descended between her and God. There, for the first time, arose from those heathen halls the voice of thanksgiving. The wild blast came, and bore away amidst its thunder the echoes of the Virgin's vesper-hymn; they floated upwards towards the snow mountains, music-clouds of incense, that marked the consecration of this wild land. And far above the loud organ-voice of the south, with its thousand altars and myriad orisons, arose from the heathen north one woman's earnest, loving prayer.

Then it seemed as though the holy ones who minister unseen to man, came and kissed her eyes into a sleep as deep and peaceful as that of the babe Hermolin on the breast of Ulrika. A veil was drawn over her senses, and the mingled sounds of the storm without, and the noisy revel within, melted to the sweetest music, and became a wondrous dream.

Beside her couch, in the spot where Hermolin had watched the first glimmer of the storm-hidden moon, the light gathered and grew, until it became a face. Pale it was, and sad; with damp, wave-bedewed hair, such as we picture those over whom the billows sweep: but the eyes looked out with a sweet human yearning, and the lips smiled with a mournful tenderness. Hermolin beheld without fear, for amidst the spirit-beauty of that face was an earthly likeness she knew well, and in her dream all that she had by chance heard concerning her husband's birth grew

clear to her. She whispered, not afraid, "It is Olof's mother."—Not with human voice did the vision answer, but it seemed that the soul of the dead overshadowed the sleeping soul of the living, and taught it the wisdom of the spirit-land. She saw why the flower had withered, because it had no root of indwelling love to be its life; and she learned more of love's nature—that its strength is in itself—that it stretches not forth its arms, saying, "Bless me, as I would fain bless—I give, therefore let me receive;" but draws its light from its own essence, and pours it out in a sunshine-flood, surrounding and impenetrating the beloved with radiance, as the sun the earth, from which it asks no answering brightness, save the faint reflection of that which itself has given.

And while yet was present in her dream the pale shadow of Hjalmar's joyless wife, whom not even mother-bliss could keep from the land of peace for which the broken spirit yearned, Hermolin looked towards her own future, and grew strong.

"I love, therefore I can endure all—can achieve all;" was the resolution that shot like a sunbeam through the sleeper's soul; and at the moment a ministering angel looked into that soul, changing the proud resolve into the humblest of prayers,—"*I can*; Thou God helping me!"

Then the pale spirit seemed to rejoice with exceeding gladness, while a human mother-love made her joy still more sublime and tender. And, behold! there stood beside her another soul, whose dark orbs added to

their earth-likeness the glory of eyes which have looked on God. And, the mortal semblance not utterly taken away, but exalted into that perfection which the smile of divinity creates out of very dust, Hermolin knew instinctively that it was Ulrika.

Bending together over the sleeper, the two mother-souls kissed her brow, and fled.

Lift up thy voice again, O north wind, whose wings have been the airy chariots of heavenly messengers—lift up thy voice once more, but let it be in a grand, solemn hymn, such as should arise from the land of snows. And, rifling through the harmonious cloud, let there be a sunburst of melody telling of love—pure love—its strength, its holiness, its long-suffering, its omnipotence—love which dwells in humanity, as its divinest essence,—love—which *is* God.

CHAPTER VI.

BEYOND the sea-coast, the abode of the race of Hialmar, arises a great mountain; pine forests, huge and dark, clothe its foot; above them tower the gray masses of bare rock, and higher still comes the region of eternal snows. There sits the spirit of white Death, sublime in beautiful desolation; and over it the stars creep, solemn and never wearied watchers throughout the perpetual night. It is a land of silence, without movement, without life. Beneath—a vast plain, whereon

no trees wave; above—a dull gray sky, over which not a cloud is seen to float. Earth and heaven mock each other in terrible tranquility, and the wind steals between them, soundless as themselves, for there is nothing to interrupt its path.

Lo! one trace of life lingers on this land of death—one bold footstep marks the snow—one proud head lifts itself fearlessly up towards the leaden sky. The spirit that guides them is a woman's—one of the most daring of the daughters of the north. Alone, Ulva ascends through forest and rock, to that desolate snow-plain, to ask counsel of the only living soul who inhabits the mountain—the priestess of the Nornir.

Ulva reached the verge of the plain where Svenska had formed her dwelling. It was said that the priestess of the Nornir needed no human sustenance, and that from the time when two stray bear-hunters found the maiden-babe lying on the white plain, she had abode there, a daughter of the unknown world.

And in truth, when Ulva stood before her, the likeness of the priestess was not unbefitting her supposed descent. The dweller among the snows was of a presence that harmonized with the pallid desolation around. Life seemed to flow all bloodlessly beneath the marble limbs; the features were almost ghastly in their motionless and perfect beauty. Her pale yellow hair fell down in masses, and her drapery moved as she moved, gathering round her in spectral folds, and floating without a sound, as snowy clouds over the sky.

Ulva fell at her feet, and gazed at her with a strange mingling of religious adoration and human love. Then Svenska's lips unclosed, to answer and to exhort; and the snow-statue became the inspired priestess. Long they talked—the passionate woman of earth and the calm daughter of solitudes; and their speech was of the new strange worship that was creeping upon Odin's land, after the footsteps of the southern bride, who had been brought into the halls of Hialmar.

“I see it coming,” cried Ulva, vehemently. “The shapeless horror has its foot already on the threshold of the Viking. Already Olof fights no more, but sits idly by the hearth, and listens to southern tales from the whining tongue of Hermolin. Even now the mead-cup and the meats due to Odin are given to the throats of sick beggars, whom our fathers suffered not to cumber earth! And my lord Olof, the babe that I reared, hears it said that the gods of his fathers are false, but pardons the accursed lie, because it comes from his wife's lips. O priestess, to whom, if thou be the daughter of the gods, I have given year by year at least somewhat of mortal nurture, until the child I loved has grown up into the sacred maiden I adore—holy Svenska, give thy counsel! How shall I tread in the dust this growing fire—how save from defilement the worship of Odin?”

Svenska lifted her face to the east, where out of the darkness were beginning to shoot the starry battalions of the aurora borealis. Then she said, “Follow,” and began to traverse the snow with almost winged speed.

At last Ulva and her guide stood on the apex of the mountain where three peaks lifted themselves up—the utmost boundary of the visible world; beyond, all was nothingness. The peculiar idealization of Norse-worship, which in the grandest and most fearful objects of nature found its divinities, had symbolized in these giant rocks the three Nornir, or Destinies, Udr, Verthandi, and Skulld. As they stood out against the cold gray sky, imagination might have traced in each a vague outline, somewhat resembling a female form, beneath the veil of snow which no human hand could ever remove. Thus, it was not strange that in these solemn shapes, standing between earth and heaven, their worshippers should see the emblems of the Rulers of human destiny, until at last, as in all symbolized faiths, the myth and its outward type became one.

Svenska raised her voice, and it rang through the still, ice-bound air like a clarion—

“There is a spirit arising in Odin’s land, of unknown might. The priest trembles beneath the temple’s shadow, and the warrior’s hand grows palsied upon the spear. Shall it grow up like a darkness over the shrines of our gods and the graves of our fathers? Skulld, far-seer into the future, answer!”

But there was silence over all.

Svenska bowed herself to the ground, and then said—

“It is vain! From north to south, from east to west, between earth and sky float the threads which the Nornir weave. They are there, encompassing us

continually, and yet we see them not. We walk with our heads aloft, but it is they who guide us; our minds may will, but it is they who control our minds. Therefore, hear my counsel, though it speaks not with an airy voice, but with a woman's tongue."

"I hear—I obey," answered Ulva, tremblingly.

"There are two spirits which govern man—ambition and love. The first is ever strongest, except in those pure and noble natures which seem less human than divine. Let the sound of battle rouse the young Viking from his dream. Let him dye the seas purple with his enemies' blood, and Odin will be appeased. The fierce shout of northern victory will drown the beguiling whisper of a woman, and the son of Hialmar will rejoice again in the bold faith of his fathers."

* * * * *

News came to Jarl Olof, that the King of Upsala was about to fall upon him with fire and sword. How the rumour reached him, the young Viking knew not, and for a long time he scarcely heeded it, but sunned himself in the placid, tender smile, that day by day was melting the frost off his stern northern heart—the smile of Hermolin. But then, as time passed on, the nurse, Ulva, ever seemed to stand between the husband and wife. Olof shrank from the bitterness of the proud, mocking eye, which had exercised a strange influence over him from his childhood; and sometimes, too, her tongue cast out its sharp, pointed stings, even

among the honey-words with which she still flattered the son of her care.

When spring came on, the young Viking yearned for his olden life of free warfare. He would fain forestall the taunts of the King of Upsala, and requite his words with blows; and though Hermolin shuddered at her lord's danger, and prayed him not enter on a sinful and causeless war, still he refused to hearken. So the sails were set, the vessel danced over the waters, and Hermolin was left to the bitterness of that first parting. A parting it was, not like that when soul is knitted unto soul, to cling in true faith and love, through distance, absence, time—nay, even through that severance which drops the veil of immortality between flesh and spirit—but it was a separation when a few leagues, a few weeks, are enough to blot out the past, and form a bar between the two to which the perfect bond of union is unknown. Therefore, when Hermolin saw her lord's ship fade like a speck upon the seas, it seemed as though the first dawning dream of Olof's affection faded too, and she became overwhelmed with the burden of forsaken love.

Thou meek woman's heart, content with so little and giving so much, who shall requite thee? Yet what guerdon needest thou, to whom the act of loving is alone bliss, and hope, and strength? Go on thy way, thou true one, and wait until the end!

The Viking's ship returned in triumph, laden with prey. Hermolin, when she flew to her lord and nestled in his breast, shedding joyful tears, forgot all

but the bliss of Olof restored to her. She sat with him in his hall of state while he apportioned the spoil, and decided the fortune of the captives; and while the duty pained her gentle heart, and almost wrung her conscience, Hermolin strove to stifle all other feelings for the love she bore to him, and comport herself in everything as became the wife of the great northern Jarl.

Among the captives was a man who, standing behind the rest, directed every glance of his piercing eyes towards the Viking's wife. Chains weighed down his small, spare limbs, and his frame was worn and wasted; yet still the lightnings of those wondrous eyes glittered above the ruins made by time. At last, all were dismissed—except this man. Olof glanced carelessly at him, but Hermolin beheld only the face of her lord, until the stern reply of the prisoner to the Jarl's question attracted her notice.

“My name, wouldst thou, son of Hialmar? Ask thy wife: she knows it well, if her heart has not lost its home-memories, as her tongue its southern speech. Hermolin, are thine eyes too proud to look upon Angarius?”

Trembling, half with fear and half with joy, Hermolin sprang forward, and would have fallen at his feet, but Olof restrained her.

“Child, what is this rude beggar to thee? Thou forgettest thyself.”

Break, struggling heart, whom fearful love makes weaker still! What shouldst thou do? Helplessly,

Hermolin sank back, and hid her face from the monk.

“Is it even so?” cried Ansgarius. “Art thou an apostate? Then, may the curse——”

But while the terrible words were yet half-formed, he caught Hermolin’s imploring glance, and saw that, half hidden beneath her robe, her fingers closed despairingly over Ulrika’s cross.

“God judge thee, I dare not,” he added more softly in the Provençal tongue. “Oh, daughter of my love, that I should meet thee with almost a curse on my lips! But no! it shall be a blessing—it must be, thou child of many prayers!”

The softened tone, the long-forgotten Provençal tongue, pierced her heart. She sank on her knees and sobbed. Olof looked at her, half wondering, half angry.

“Forgive me, my lord, my beloved! But this man’s speech is that of my own far land, and it makes me weep.”

“As thou wilt, as thou wilt,” answered Olof, coldly; “but thy tears should flow unwitnessed. Prisoner, leave the hall.”

And as the followers of the Viking removed Ansgarius, the Jarl strode carelessly from his wife’s presence, without another glance at her drooping and grief-stricken form.

“Oh, Mother of Mercies!” cried Hermolin, “did I pray for this joyful day of my lord’s return, and lo! it is a time of bitterness and woe! And thou wilt

be slain, Ansgarius, it may be by the hand of my Olof! Holy Virgin of Consolation, all is darkness before me! I faint—I die! Oh, guide me through the gloom!”

Wait, thou tried and patient one. “*At evening-tide it shall be light.*” Wait and pray.

Olof sat at night, lazily dreaming over the fire-light in his hall, when he heard the voice of Ulva whispering in his ear,—

“Is the Jarl sleeping, while his wife is opening the prison doors? Why should my lord Olof waste his strength and shed his blood to take captives, when the Lady Hermolin sets them free?”

Olof, half roused from his slumber, spoke angrily,—

“Ulva, hold thy peace! Hermolin is asleep in her chamber.”

“Is she? Come and see!” and the nurse, strong in her influence, led Olof to his wife’s deserted apartment.

“A loving welcome for a long-absent lord!” said the sneering voice. “It was no pale vision I saw gliding, lamp in hand, until it entered the prison of the southern captive—her paramour.”

“Woman!” thundered Olof, “one word against my pure wife, and I slay thee with this hand. It was a priest, a gray-headed priest of her faith.”

“And therefore thou wilt save him from death, and load him with honours! Son of Hialmar, on thy father’s tomb the spectral light yet burns, but thick darkness will fall over thine. Hialmar was the last of Odin’s heroes; Olof will sing psalms in the Christian’s heaven.”

“Never!” cried the young Jarl. “To the prison, that the priest may meet his doom!”

Silently and stealthily as death, Olof and Ulva entered. The keeper of the dungeon, looking on his chief’s dark face, prayed Odin to save from harm that gentle southern lady whom all revered and obeyed—knowing how pure and meek she was, and how dearly she loved her lord.

Hermolin was standing before Ansgarius. He awoke from his sleep, and thought it had been the presence of an angel. But when she knelt at his feet weeping, and lifted up the mournful, Esau-like cry: “Bless me, even me also, O my father!”—then the stern missionary knew that it was the child whom he had taught, the young soul whom he had trained for the great work for which he believed it chosen.

“And God may fulfil that destiny yet, since thou hast not belied thy faith even among the heathen,” said Ansgarius, when he had listened to her history since she left the shores of Provence. “He may turn even this darkness into light. Heaven works not as we. When the good King Louis of France sent me to Upsala, the glad bearer of the holy cross, I thought it was Heaven’s call, and I went. And when thy lord’s vessel took us captive on the seas, I bowed my head, and said, ‘God knoweth best. It may be that he leads me where the furrows are prepared for the seed.’ Therefore, even here, in this dark prison, I rejoice and sing for joy.”

“But if danger should come, if thy blood should be poured out upon this savage land?”

“It will be but as the early rain to soften the hard ground,” said Ansgarius, with a calm smile. “And God will find himself another and a worthier husbandman, to follow after, and plant, and water, until the land be filled with increase.”

So talked the son of Ulrika. O blessed mother, whose prayers had thus brought forth such glorious fruit! And then, all unconscious of the presence of others, the two knelt down in the prison, like the saints of old, and prayed. The strong, fearless man of faith, the meek and gentle woman, were types of the two foundations on which the early church was laid—the spirit of holy boldness and the spirit of love.

Ulva and the son of Hialmar stood in the darkness, and unobserved, heard all.

Then Hermolin arose, and Olof’s name came to her lips with a heavy sigh.

“My heart is sore even to deceive him thus,” she said. “I would not, save for thee. Must it be ever so, that my faith to heaven must war with the dear love I bear my lord—my true—my noble Olof.”

Ansgarius looked surprised; his strong heart, engrossed in one life-purpose, had no room for human love. He understood it not. Even Hermolin had been to him only the instrument wherewith to work out his end.

“Dost thou love him so?” he said, in a compassionate tone. “Poor child! Happier are those who

give Heaven all. Now, my daughter, leave me to pray. Who knoweth how soon death may come from the hands of these godless men?"

Hermolin threw herself on the ground at his feet. "Oh, my father, my father, thou shalt not die!" was her agonised cry. "If thou wouldst fly? The night is dark—my lord sleeps."

Ansgarius turned round, and fixed upon her his gaze of stern reproof.

"A wife deceive her husband!—a Christian dare not confess his God! Is it for this we bear the Cross unto the snow mountains?"

"No, no, thou must stay, and God will protect thee, O dear father! Olof, my Olof! I love thee—I trust thee—I will pray night and day that this sin may be kept from thy soul."

And while Hermolin called on her lord's name, Olof came forward and stood before them both. His face was very pale, but there was in it a beauty and a softness that resembled the young St. John of the convent. His presence caused no fear, only an awe-struck silence. Then Olof spoke—

"Priest, I brought this sword to drink thy life's blood. I lay it now at thy feet. It shall not be said that the son of Odin was less noble than his Christian foe. Hermolin!"

She sprang to his arms—she clung there, and they folded round her as in that first embrace, when the young bridegroom stood at the convent-gate. And Hermolin felt that even the wild devotion of the

maiden was as nothing to the fulness of the wife's love.

The prison-doors closed on the retreating footsteps of three. But there was one who stayed behind, unnoticed in the darkness, gnashing her teeth, and cursing the day when a Christian foot first entered Odin's land.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE was again a footstep on the snow mountains, and Ulva once more poured out her soul at the feet of the priestess of the Nornir.

"The darkness gathers," she cried. "Odin has hidden his face from the northern land. Accursed be the victory that brought the Christian captive to our shores! My lord turned his foot aside; he would not crush the worm, and lo! it is growing into a serpent, whose venomous folds will fill the land. Already our warriors listen to the Christian priest, with his wily tongue. Already the worshippers desert Odin's fane; while the poor, the helpless, the weak, women and children, lift up their hands to another God than the great Ruler of Asgard. And Jarl Olof heeds not though his people cast scorn on the faith of his fathers. Svenska, thou wisest one, who hearest the voice of the Nornir, inquire what may be the end of this terrible change that is coming over the land?"

Svenska answered not, but pointed silently to the

place where the three rocks stood. Ulva remained at a distance, while the priestess performed her strange rites. The sound of her clear, shrill voice came borne on the air, rising at times into a cry, more like that of a soul in torment than a woman's tone. It seemed to pierce the heart of the Norsewoman. She grovelled on the earth, burying her head among the snows.

"My Svenska, my beloved," she moaned, "oh, that I could take thee to this heart, and feel thine own answer to it with human throbs! But I dare not—the pure soul would scorn the impure. Great Odin, if the sin was great, how heavy is the punishment!"

When after a time she lifted up her head, Svenska stood before her.

"Have the Nornir spoken?" asked Ulva, scarcely daring to look upon the face of the Daughter of the Snows.

"They utter no voice; but I feel them in my soul," said Svenska. "It is a terrible call; yet I must answer. Listen! The last of the race of Hjalmar must not bring shame on his fathers. If Jarl Olof be left to yield to the persuasions of a woman and the guile of a priest, the faith of Odin will vanish from the land."

"And how, O Svenska, can we sway the son of Hjalmar, that this evil may not come?"

The face of the young priestess was strangely convulsed; and when after a while she spoke, her voice was like an icy whisper.

"I told thee once that there were two ruling spirits

in man—ambition and love. With Olof one has fallen powerless—the other yet remains. The spell of human passion must stand between the Jarl and his doom—the doom of those who despise the might of Odin.”

A wild light shode in Ulva's fierce eyes.

“Would that it might be so—that a northern maid might tread under foot the dark-browed Hermolin. But our pure maidens would not cast their eyes on another woman's lord, and who is there to win Olof from Hermolin?”

“I!”

Ulva uttered a cry, almost of agony. “Thou, my beautiful—my pure one—white-souled as the snows that name thee—thou to stoop to earth's sin—to be made the sacrifice!” she muttered, hoarsely.

It seemed as though a fallen spirit had entered that marble statue, and animated its pale beauty with a power new and terrible to behold. Svenska lifted her arms upwards, and cried with a wild vehemence—

“Dread Nornir, I feel around me the threads ye weave; they draw my feet onward, and whither they lead I go. Never shall the worship of Odin fall before that of the Christian's God. I devote myself to shame—to sin which the sacrifice makes holy—that the Dwellers in Asgard may still look down upon the land, and the children of the north may not turn aside from the faith of their fathers.”

Ulva sank at Svenska's feet, folded them in her arms, and kissed them passionately. Then she rose up, and followed the steps of the priestess in silence. Only as

they passed the three rock-statues her agony burst forth in a low moaning—

“Terrible Nornir, sin-avengers, to whom as atonement I devoted this child, ye have made the precious gift an arrow to pierce my soul!”

* * * * *

The Jarl Olof came home from a bear-hunt, carrying with him a strange prize. He had found in the snows a maiden, pale and almost lifeless, yet of unearthly beauty. Gradually the soul awakened in that lovely form, and looked at Olof from out the heavenly eyes. His own answered to it with a vague pleasure, and sweet in his ear sounded the voice which uttered musically the accents of the Norse tongue. The young Jarl himself bore the weak and fainting form for many weary leagues, until he brought the beautiful, desolate one to the presence of his wife, and laid her in Hermolin's chamber.

Hermolin bent over her in pity and amaze. She, too, was penetrated to the very soul with that dazzling and wondrous beauty—so spiritual, and yet so human. The Jarl's wife twined her fingers among the pale amber tresses with almost childlike admiration, and gazed wistfully on the white round arms and graceful throat, beneath whose marble purity a faint rose-hue began to steal, while the life-current again wandered through the blue delicate veins.

“Olof, how beautiful she is—like one of the angels which I used to see in my childish dreams. How

happy it must be to know oneself so fair." And a light sigh thrilled Hermolin's bosom.

Olof did not answer; *his* eyes, too—nay, his whole soul, drank in the beauty of which Hermolin spoke. The wife saw it, and again she sighed.

Far behind the group stood one who beheld the gaze, and heard the sigh; and Ulva's heart throbbed with fierce exultation, for she saw from afar the rising of that little cloud.

Months passed away, and still the stranger maiden cast the magic of her superhuman beauty over the halls of the Viking. Aslauga, when she came forth from the harp like a spirit of light, or when she stood before Ragnar Lodbrog, enchaining the sea-king with the spells of a lovely soul in a lovely form—Aslauga herself was not more omnipotent than was the strange Daughter of the Snows. And day by day, over Svenska's beauty there crept a new charm—a softness and all-subduing womanliness, that endowed with life and warmth the once passionless form. Olof beheld, and his soul bent like a reed before the storm of wild emotions that swept over him.

Poor wife, who weepst all alone, on whom has faded the light of that dearest smile—who seest each day the love wane, though an innate nobleness still makes duty keep its place in the heart where it was thy heaven to rest—Hermolin, will thy love fail now?—will it sink in the trial?—or will it forget itself and its own wrongs, and watch over the sinner with tenderness and prayers, until

it bring him back in forgiveness, repentance, and peace?

Listen how that faithful, patient heart answers the words which the stern monk pours out against the erring man who is tempted to betray such love.

“My father,” said Hermolin, when Ansgarius would fain have dealt out reproaches and threatenings against her husband,—“my father, condemn him not yet. It is a bitter struggle; he is tempted sore. How sweet is her smile!—how glorious her beauty!—while I, alas! alas!—I have only love to give him. And then she is from his own North, and she speaks to him of his fathers, and her fierce nature tempts yet governs his. Oh, that I could be all this—that I could make myself more like Olof—more worthy to win his precious love!”

And when the inflexible spirit of Ansgarius, in justly condemning the sin, shut out all compassion for the sinner, Hermolin only wept.

“Father, have pity on him—on me. He did love me once—he will love me yet. I will be patient; and love is so strong to bear—so omnipotent in prayers; Heaven will keep him from sin, and I shall win him back. Olof, my Olof! God will not let me die until thou lovest me as I have loved—as I do love thee—my soul’s soul!—my life’s blessing!”

And ere the words were well uttered, an angel carried them to heaven, and then cast them down again upon the spirit of him who had won such love. The invisible influence fell upon him, even though he stood

alone with Svenska, overwhelmed with the delirium of her presence.

She had enchained his senses ; she had drawn from his lips the avowal of sinful passion ; she had strengthened her power over him by bringing into the earthly bond all the influences of their ancient faith, to which she had won him back ; and now, her end gained, Svenska quailed before the tempest she had raised.

What power was it which had changed the priestess, who once cast her arms to heaven with that terrible vow, into the trembling woman who dared not look on Olof's face ; and, who even in her triumphant joy, shrank before the passion of his words ?

He promised her that her heart's desire should be accomplished—that no Christian prayer should be heard in Odin's land—that the monk and his proselytes should be swept from the face of the earth.

Why was it, O Svenska, that even then, when the flash of triumph had faded from thine eyes, they sank earthwards, and thy lips quivered like a weak girl's ?

“There is one thing more, Olof, and then I give thee my love,” she said. “The shadow is passing, and Odin's smile will again brighten our shores ; but the land is still defiled—blood only can make it pure. There must be a sacrifice.”

Her voice rose, her stature dilated, and Svenska was again the inspired of the Nornir. As Olof beheld her, even his own bold spirit quailed beneath the fearful strength of hers.

“There must be a sacrifice!” she repeated in yet more vehement tones. “In the dark night a voice haunts me, and the words are ever the same; when I look on the snow mountains, I see there traces of blood, which never pass away. Odin demands the offering, and will not be appeased. Olof! I am thine—when thou has given up the victim.”

“Who?” murmured Olof, instinctively drooping his face beneath the glare of those terrible eyes.

She stooped over him; her soft breath swept his cheek; her fair serpent lips approached his ear; they uttered one name—“Hermolin!”

He sprang from her side with a shuddering cry. One moment he covered his eyes, as though to shut out some horrible sight, and then the tempted stood face to face with the tempter. The veil had fallen: he beheld in her now, not the beautiful beguiler, but the ghastly impersonation of the meditated crime. It stood revealed in all its black deformity; it hissed at him in that perfumed breath; it scorched him in the lightnings of those lustrous eyes. Horror-stricken and dumb, he gazed, until at last his lips formed themselves into the echo of that one word—“Hermolin!”

It fell like a sunburst upon his clouded spirit, and, rifted through that blackest darkness, Olof beheld the light. He sprang towards it; for there was yet something of the angel in the young Northman’s soul—how else could Hermolin have loved him? Through the silent hall rang that name—bursting from the husband’s

lips and heart—first as a murmur, then as a wild, yearning cry—“Hermolin, Hermolin!”

Surely it was an angel who bore that call to the wife's ear—who guided her feet all unwittingly to where her beloved wrestled with deadly sin. Lo! as it were in answer to his voice, Hermolin stood at the entrance of the hall. Olof glanced at Svenska; her beauty seemed changed to the likeness of a fiend. And there, soft-smiling on him, with the loving face of old, leaned Hermolin, her arms stretched out, as if to welcome him in forgiveness and peace to the shelter of that pure breast.

He fled there. There was a cry such as rarely bursts from man's lips—“Hermolin, Hermolin, save me!” and Olof knelt at her feet, hiding his face in her garments, pressing her hands upon his eyes, as though to shut out the sight of the lure which so nearly led him on to be an adulterer and a murderer.

Hermolin asked nought, said nought—but she folded her arms round his neck; she knelt beside him, and drew his head to her bosom, as a mother would a beloved and repentant child. Then she whispered softly, “Olof, my husband, come!” and led him away, his hand still clinging for safety and guidance to that faithful one of hers; and his eyes never daring to turn away from her face, which looked on him like an angel's from out of heaven, full of love so holy, so complete, that pardon itself had no place there.

Svenska stood beholding them, still and fixed as a

stone, until Olof's form passed from her sight; then she fell to the earth without a cry or sound.

Ulva's breast was soon her pillow—Ulva who haunted her steps like a shadow. No mother's fondness could have poured out more passionate words over the insensible form; but when the shadow of seeming death left the beautiful face, the nurse's manner became again that of distant and reverent tenderness.

"Priestess of the Nornir, awake!" she said. "Let the curse of Odin fall: we will go far hence into the mountains, and leave the race of Hialmar to perish. Thy vow was vain; but the Nornir were not wholly pitiless. No shame has fallen upon thee, pure Daughter of the Snows!"

Svenska heard not—heeded not. Drawing herself away from all support, the young priestess stood erect.

"Dread Nornir! is this your will? Have ye deceived me?—nay, but I beguiled myself. How could evil work out good? Odin scorns the unholy offering; the sinful vow brings its own punishment. Olof, Olof! whom I came to betray, I love thee, as my own soul I love thee, and in vain."

It was no more the priestess, but a desolate, despairing woman, who lay there on the cold ground, and moaned in incontrollable anguish. Ulva, stung to the heart, gazed on her without a word. The day of requital had come at last.

When the feeble daylight changed into the star-lit beauty of a northern night, a clear sound pierced the

silence of the hall. It was the Christian vesper-hymn, led by a fresh young voice, through whose melody trembled infinite gladness—the voice of Hermolin. Svenska, aroused from her trance, sprang madly to her feet.

“Olof, Olof!” she cried, “the curse of Odin will fall; the Christians will beguile thee, and I shall never see thee after death in the blessed dwellings of the *Æser*. Is there no help—no atonement? Ah!” she continued, and her voice suddenly rose from the shrillness of despair to the full tone of joy—“I see it now! Odin! thy will is clear: mine ear heard truly—mine eye saw plain! The sacrifice—the human sacrifice is needed to save his soul—it shall be offered still, and Odin’s wrath be turned away. To the mountain—the mountain! Son of Hialmar, I will yet await thee in the Valhalla of thy fathers!”

She darted from the hall, and bounded away with the speed of the wind. Night and day—night and day—far up in the mountains, did Ulva follow that flying form, until at times she thought it was only the spirit and not the real form of the priestess that still flitted on before her sight. At last she came to a ravine, in which lay a frozen sea of snow; on its verge stood a white figure, with the outstretched arms and the amber floating hair.

As Ulva looked, there grew on the stillness a sound like the roaring of the sea; and a mighty avalanche, loosened from its mountain cave, came heaving on. Nearer, nearer it drew, but the pale shape stood there

still; it passed, and the Daughter of the Snows slept beneath it.

The Daughter of the Snows? Whence, then, that shriek of mother's agony, the last that ever parted Ulva's lips—"My child, my own—own child!" Let Death, the great treasure-house of mysteries, hide until eternity one dread secret more!

THE ROSICRUCIAN.

A Tale of Cologne.

I.—THE FIRE.

I KNOW not if men would say that the face of Basil Wolgemuth was beautiful. There were no darkly-gleaming eyes, no sculptured features, no clustering raven locks ; all was fair, clear, and sunny, as his own soul. And what a soul was that ! It lighted up his whole countenance, as the sun lights up a landscape—making that which would else have been ordinary, most glorious. It was mirrored in his eyes ; it shone in his every gesture ; it made music in his voice ; it accompanied him like a fair presence, giving life, love, and beauty wherever he moved.

He sat in a low-roofed, half darkened chamber, whose gloomy recesses looked almost fearful. Now and then passing sounds of human voices rose up from the street below, and ever and anon the great bell of Cologne

Cathedral boomed out the hours, making the after silence deeper still. The student—for such he evidently was—leaned his slight and rather diminutive form in the attitude of one wearied; but there was no lassitude visible in his expressive face, and his eyes were fixed with a dreamy and thoughtful gaze on the blazing faggots that roared and sparkled on the hearth before him.

The Fire was his sole companion, and it was good company, in sooth. Not mute either—for it seemed to talk like a human voice. How the live juices hissed out, when the damp pine-wood caught the blaze, and chattered and muttered like a vexed child! How furiously it struggled and roared, as the flames grew stronger! How it sunk into a low complaining sound, and then into a dead stillness, being conquered at last, and breathing its life out in a ruddy but silent glow. Such was the voice of the Fire; but the student beheld its form too. Quaint and mysterious were the long fiery alleys and red caverns which it made; mingled with black hollows, out of which mocking faces seemed to peep; while the light flames waving to and fro were like aërial shapes moving in a fantastic dance. Beautiful and mystic appeared the Fire.

Basil Wolgemuth was a student and a dreamer. He had pierced into the secrets of nature and of philosophy, not as an idle seeker, mechanically following the bent of a vague curiosity, but as an enthusiastic lover, who would fathom the depths of his beloved's soul. He knew that in this world all things bear two meanings;

one for the common observer, one for the higher mind of him who with an earnest purpose and a steadfast but loving heart, penetrates into those mines of hidden riches—the treasures of science and of imagination. Basil was still young; and yet men of learning and power listened with deference to his words; wisdom, rank, and beauty, had trodden that poor chamber, and felt honoured—for it was the habitation of genius.

And was all this sunshine of fame lavished upon a barren tree, which brought forth at best only the dazzling fruits of mere intellect, beautiful to the eye but deceptive to the heart as the jewelled apples of Aladdin, or was it rich in all good fruits of human kindness? Ask the mother, to whom the very footsteps of her dutiful son brought light and gladness; ask the sister, whose pride in her noble kinsman was even less than her love for the gentle and forbearing brother who made the sunshine of their home. These would speak for Basil. There was one—one more; but he knew it not then.

The fire sank down to a few embers, and through the small window at the further end of the apartment, the young moon looked with her quiet smile. At last the door was half opened, and a girlish face peeped in.

“Are you sleeping, Basil, or only musing?”

“Is that you, Margareta?” said the student, without changing his attitude.

“Yes—it is growing late, brother: will you not come to supper?”

“I do not need it, dear Margareta, thank you.”

“But we want you, Basil; my mother is asking for you; and Isilda, too, is here.”

A bright smile passed over the young man's face; but his sister did not see it, and continued—

“Come, brother—do come; you have studied enough for to-day.”

He rose up cheerfully—“Well, then, tell my mother I will come directly.”

Margareta closed the door, and Basil stood thoughtfully by the fire. At that moment a bright flame, springing up from some stray brand yet unkindled, illumined his face—it was radiant with the light of love. His finely curved lips, the sole beautiful feature there, were trembling with a happy smile, as they murmured in low tones one beloved name—“Isilda, Isilda!”

II.—THE STUDENT'S HOME.

LET us glance at the home of Basil Wolgemuth. It was a German habitation of the middle ages; a comfortable but not luxurious dwelling, such a one as we see in old German pictures. In homes like this was nurtured the genius of Rembrandt, of Rubens, of Vandyck; from such a peaceful German home sprang the fiery spirit and indomitable zeal of Luther; and in like home-nests were cradled the early years of most of the rude but noble men, who, either by the sword or

the pen, have made their names famous throughout the fair land of the Rhine.

Basil, his mother, Margareta, and another young girl, sat round a table, spread with the ample fare of bread and fruits. The mother was worthy of such a son—a matron of placid but noble aspect; like him, too, in the deep clear eyes and open forehead. Margareta, a sweet bud, which only needed time to burst forth into a perfect flower, sat by her brother's side; the fourth of the group was Isilda.

I hardly know how to describe Isilda. There is one face only I have seen which pictures her to my idea; it is a Madonna of Guido Reni's. Once beheld, that face imprints itself for ever on the heart. It is the embodiment of a soul so pure, so angelic, that it might have been Eve's when she was still in Eden; yet there is in the eyes that shadow of woman's intense love, the hand-maid of which is ever sorrow; and those deep blue orbs seem thoughtfully looking into the dim future with a vague sadness, as if conscious that the peace of the present would not endure. Womanly sweetness, feelings suppressed, not slumbering, a soul attuned to high thoughts like a well-strung lyre, and only needing a breath to awaken its harmonious chords—all these are visible in that face which shone into the painter's heart, and has lived for ever in the work of his hand. And such was Isilda.

Basil sat opposite to her; he looked into her eyes; he drank in her smile, and was happy. All traces of the care-worn student had vanished; he was cheerful even

to gaiety ; laughed and jested with his sister ; bade her sing old ditties, and even joined in the strain, which made them all more mirthful still. Basil had little music in his voice, but much in his heart. When the songs ceased, Margareta prayed him to repeat some old ballad, he knew so many. The student looked towards Isilda ; her eyes had more persuasive eloquence than even his sister's words, and he began—

“THE ELLE-MAID GAY.*

“Ridest by the woodland, Ludwig, Ludwig,
Ridest by the woodland gray ?
Who sits by the woodland, Ludwig, Ludwig ?
It is the Elle-maid gay.

“A kiss on thy lips lies, Ludwig, Ludwig,
Pure as the dews of May :
Think on thine own love, brown-haired Ludwig,
And not on an Elle-maid gay.

“She sits 'neath a linden, singing, singing,
Though her dropped lids nothing say ;
For her beauty lures whether smiling or singing,
For she is an Elle-maid gay.

“‘Thou hast drunk of my wine-cup, Ludwig, Ludwig,
Thou hast drunk of my lips this day ;
I am no more false than thou, young Ludwig,
Though I am an Elle-maid gay.’

* The Elle-maid or wood-woman is a kind of sprite, who in front appears as a beautiful damsel, but seen behind is hollow like a mask. She sits on the road-side, offering her wine-cup and her kiss ; but the moment a youth has tasted either, he becomes raving mad. There are many legends of this sort current in Germany.

“ ‘ Ride fast from the woodland, Ludwig, Ludwig,
 Her laughter tracks his way;
 ‘ Didst thou clasp a fair woman, Ludwig, Ludwig,
 And found her an Elle-maid gay ? ’

* * * * *

“ ‘ Flee, flee ! ’ they cry—‘ he is mad, Count Ludwig,
 He rides through the street to-day
 With his beard unshorn, and his cloak briar-torn :
 He has met with the Elle-maid gay ! ’

“ ‘ I fear him not, my knight, my Ludwig ’
 (The bride’s dear lips did say),
 ‘ Though he comes from the woodland, he is *my* Ludwig ;
 ‘ He saw not the Elle-maid gay.

“ ‘ Welcome, my lord, my love, my Ludwig ! ’
 But her smile grew ashen-gray,
 As she knew by the glare of the mad eyes’ stare,
 He had been with the Elle-maid gay.

“ ‘ God love thee—God pity thee, O my Ludwig ! ’
 Nor her true arms turned she away.
 ‘ Thou art no sweet woman,’ cried fiercely Ludwig,
 ‘ But a foul Elle-maid gay.

“ ‘ I kiss thee—I slay thee ; I—thy Ludwig : ’
 And the steel flashed bright to the day :
 ‘ Better clasp a dead bride,’ laughed out Ludwig,
 ‘ Than a false Elle-maid gay.

“ ‘ I kissed thee, I slew thee ; I—thy Ludwig ;
 And now will we sleep alway.’
 Still fair blooms the woodland where rode Ludwig,
 Still there sits the Elle-maid gay.”

The student ceased ; and there was a deep silence. Basil’s young sister glanced round fearfully. Isilda moved not ; but as the clear tones of Basil’s voice

ended, one deep-drawn sigh was heard, as it were the unconscious relief of a full heart.

"You have chosen a gloomy story, Basil," said the mother, at last. Her voice broke the spell; and Margareta added—

"I do not pity that false-hearted knight; his was a just punishment for a heavy sin: for the poor bride to die thus in her youth and happiness—oh, it was very sad!"

"Not so," said Isilda, and she spoke in a low dreamy tone, as if half to herself. "It was not sad, even to be slain by him she loved, since she died in his arms having known that he loved her. It was a happy fate."

There was such an expression of intense feeling in the girl's face as she spoke, that Margareta looked at her in wondering silence; but Basil gave an involuntary start, as if a new light had broken in upon his mind. The living crimson rushed immediately over Isilda's face and neck; she seemed shrinking into the earth with shame, and said no more. Basil, too, kept silence. No marvel was it in the timid girl who rarely gave utterance to her thoughts, but that he whose heart was so full of poetry, whose lips were ever brimming over with eloquence, should be dumb—it was passing strange! The student felt as though there was a finger laid on his lips, an unseen presence compelling him to silence; but the finger and the presence were those of the Angel of Love.

There was a constraint visible in all but Margareta;

she, too young to understand what was passing in the hearts of the two she loved so much, began to sport with her friend.

“Well! I should not envy Count Ludwig’s bride, Isilda; I would much rather live. Farewell, you dolorous folk. I will go spin.”

And she vanished with the swiftness of a young fawn. The mother followed her with her eyes.

“A sunny and loving heart is thine, my child,” she murmured. “God bless thee, and keep all care from that gay spirit!” And Madame Wolgemuth leaned back in her chair, closing her eyes. The mother’s heart seemed absorbed in the past, or else dreaming of her child’s future.

But, by the two thus left together, past and future were alike unregarded. With Basil and Isilda it was all the present—the blissful present, full of hope and love. They talked but little, and in broken sentences, flitting from subject to subject, lest each should lead to the unveiling of the delicious secret that was uppermost in both their hearts, and which they at once feared, yet longed to utter. At last the lamp grew dim, and the moonlight streamed in through the narrow window. Isilda noticed and spoke of it—it was a relief.

“How lovely the moon looks, setting behind the cathedral!” and, rising, she walked to the window: it might be she was glad to escape from the passionate tenderness of Basil’s gaze.

The young student followed her, moving noiselessly,

for his aged mother had fallen asleep. And now the two stood together, silent, alone with their own hearts, looking up to the quiet, star-lit sky, and drinking in love, which seemed infinite as that heaven itself.

“How beautiful is this world!” murmured the girl.

“I feel it so; and most when thus with thee, Isilda,” and with what unspeakable sweetness and tenderness the name lingered on his lips. “Isilda—my Isilda!”

There was a moment of tremulous silence, and then the girl felt herself drawn closer, until her head rested on his bosom, and she heard his voice whispering in her ear,—

“May I call thee *my* Isilda—all mine—mine only—mine for ever?”

She raised her head, and looked timidly but searchingly in his countenance.

“Is it indeed true—dost thou then love me?”

“As my own soul!” passionately answered the student.

Isilda hid her face again in his bosom, and burst into a shower of tears.

The girl and her lover went home together that night, through the cold, clear starlight, to Isilda’s abode. Many and many a time had they trod the same path, but now everything was changed. They had become all in all to each other; an infinity of love was around them; all was light, hope, and trembling gladness. The crisp snow crackled under Isilda’s feet, and the sharp frosty air made her shiver, but she felt it not.

She only clung the closer to Basil's arm—he was all her own now, he—her life's joy—her pride—the idol of her dreams, the delight of her soul. Such happiness was almost too much to bear; and, therefore, when she first knew that he loved her, had Isilda wept—nay, even when she had parted from Basil and was alone, her full heart poured itself forth in tears. That he—the noble—the gifted, so rich in the greatest of all wealth—the wealth of genius; honoured among men, with a glorious harvest of fame yet unreaped before him; that he should love her, who had nothing to give but a heart that worshipped him! The girl, in her humility, felt unworthy of such deep happiness; all that her lips would utter were the blessed, joyful words, “He loves me—he loves me! my Basil, mine own!” and even in her sleep, she murmured the same.

Man's love is not like woman's, yet Basil was very happy—happier than he had ever been in his life. The student, the philosopher, felt that all his wisdom was as nothing compared to the wondrous alchemy of love. So far from being weakened, his lofty mind seemed to grow richer beneath the light of beloved eyes; it was like the sunshine to the ripening corn. Basil now knew how long Isilda had filled his thoughts, and been mingled with all his hopes. He did not even then fathom the depths of her spirit, but he felt it was one with his; and man, proud man, ever rejoices to see his soul's image reflected in a woman's heart.

III.—THE ROSIE CROSS.

A YEAR had passed over the head of the student of Cologne. It had been a year full of changes. Death had entered the house and taken the tender mother—the strong-hearted but gentle matron, who had filled the place of both parents toward Basil and Margareta in their fatherless youth. The student had now only his sister to cheer his desolate home; and little joy was there in the young girl's heart, or brightness on her face, for she was still in the shadow of past sorrow, her first grief, too; and heavily it weighed upon sweet Margareta.

Have we forgotten Isilda—the beautiful—the beloved? No change had taken place in her. She was now the betrothed of Basil Wolgemuth, loving him with a depth and steadfastness far beyond the first fresh love of girlhood and romance. And Basil himself, was he still the same? Let us see.

The student was sitting, as we first beheld him, in the room more peculiarly his own; it looked the same as in former days; and the Fire, the brilliant and beautiful Fire, which Basil loved to have as a companion for his solitary hours, burned brightly as ever. He kept continually feeding it with new brands, and often looked up from his book to gaze at it. If the blaze grew dim for a moment, it seemed as if his powers of intellect and comprehension grew dim with

it. Basil was dull and cheerless without his beloved Fire; he needed its genial warmth, its inspiring brightness; even in the summer time he could not study without it—and so it had been from his childhood.

There was a change in the young man, more than the one short year added to his age could have effected. He looked like a man who had thought much—suffered much. An expression of pain constantly hovered over his features, and the lines of his beautiful mouth were contracted. He read intently; but at intervals laid down the book, and fixed his eyes vacantly on the fire, absorbed in thought.

A light knock at the door broke in upon the student's meditations, and a stranger entered. He was a man of middle age; tall, spare, and meagre. His face was calm, and his bearing dignified; while on his noble forehead, which bore not a single wrinkle, unmistakable intellect sat enthroned: but at times there was a wildness in his eyes, and a sudden kindling of his features, which almost belied his serene deportment. He advanced towards the young man, who arose and greeted him with deep respect.

“Michael Meyer need not stay to ask admittance of Basil Wolgemuth, I trust?” said the stranger, in tones of mingled gentleness and conscious dignity.

“My master,” answered Basil, meekly, “thou art ever most welcome; all that is mine is thine also.”

“I thank thee, gentle scholar,” returned the other, simply, with a slight inclination of the head, as he suf-

ferred the young man to take from him his outer garment, and sat down on the chair which Basil offered. The student himself continued standing until his guest pointed to a low stool, where Basil placed himself at a little distance from his master.

“And now let us talk,” said Michael Meyer; “for it is long since I have seen thee. What hast thou learned meanwhile?”

“Much, O master! I have been studying thy book,” and he pointed to the open page.

A gleam of pleasure illuminated Michael’s sallow features. “And dost thou ever regret that thou hast become one of us, one of the brethren of the Rosie Cross?”

“Never, honoured master mine,” cried the student; “but I have yet so much to learn, before I am worthy even to kiss the hem of thy garment; and I am so young.”

“It may be that a young heart is purer than one which has longer mingled with the world. Thou hast not yet travelled out of sight of the home which thy spirit left at birth; the memory of that pristine existence dimly remains with thee still. Therefore it is well with thee, Basil.”

“Master, if I could only think so—if I could only revive within me that higher life—but I fear it is hard.”

“It is hard, my son; for it is a struggle of matter against spirit. Oh, didst thou but know the joys that are opened unto us who mortify the body for the sake

of the soul; the glorious and beautiful world that is revealed to us—a life within life, a double existence, our mortal eyes being strengthened to behold the Invisible—our mortal frames endowed with the powers of angels.”

“It is glorious—glorious!” murmured the student as he gazed on his master, whose whole countenance gleamed with enthusiasm.

“It is indeed glorious,” continued Michael Meyer. “To be as a god to mankind; to bear in this human body the gift of healing; to know that the riches for which men toil, and pine, and slay one another, are at our will in such abundance that they seem to us like dust. And more than all, to have the power of holding communion with those good spirits which God created as he created man, more beautiful and yet less perfect, for they must remain as first made, while man may rise through various stages of existence, higher and higher, until he reach the footstool of divinity itself.”

“Hast thou ever seen those glorious beings?” asked Basil, glancing doubtfully round, his voice sinking into a low whisper.

“I have!” answered Michael Meyer. “But no more of this. To attain this state of perfection, thou must needs deaden thyself to all human pleasures; thou must forsake the grossness of an appetite pampered with the flesh of beasts and the fruit of the poison-vine. As thou readest in my book, the soul must retire within itself—must shut out all human feelings, all human love.”

A dark shadow came over the young student’s face.

“ Must one attain all this, O father, to be a follower of Christian Rosencreutz ? ” *

“ All this, and more. Does thy heart fail thee ? ” said Michael, sternly.

Basil cast down his eyes.

“ No, my noble master, no ! but human will is feeble, and the steep is hard to climb.”

“ Then lie down, and perish at its foot, Basil Wolgemuth,” said the Rosicrucian ; and then added, with a regretful tone, “ After thou hadst journeyed halfway, I had not thought thy heart would have failed thee, my son.”

“ It has not failed me,” cried the student, earnestly. “ I have followed implicitly all thy precepts. No food, save what nature rigorously requires, has passed these lips ; I have kept myself pure as a little child, yet still I seem further than ever from that blessed state when the soul is free from all mortal longings, and the eyes are purged to behold the Invisible.”

“ Wait, my son ; wait and faint not ! the time will surely come at last ; and when it does, oh, what joy for thee ! Thou wilt count as nothing the pleasures of taste, when thou mayst banquet on celestial food ; thou wilt scorn all earthly loveliness, to bask in the smile of immortal beauty. This, indeed, is an aim worthy of man’s aspiring.”

* After the death of Christian Rosencreutz, their founder, the sect of the Rosicrucians kept their doctrines secret for a hundred and twenty years. Michael Meyer, an alchemist and physician, was the first to reveal their secrets, by a book entitled “ *Themis Aurea, hoc est de legibus Fraternitatis Rosæ Crucis*,” which he published at Cologne, in 1615.

“It is—it is! O master, I follow thee!—teach me, guide me as thou wilt;” and he knelt at the feet of the Rosicrucian, kissing his hands and his garments with deep emotion.

“Thou art worthy to become one of us, my son—nay, my brother—for thou wilt ere long equal the wisest of us,” answered Michael Meyer, as he raised Basil from the earth. “Go on in that noble path; thou hast little need of me, for thine own soul is thy best teacher. Now farewell, for this night I leave Cologne; my work is accomplished, and I have added one more to the brethren of the Rosie Cross.”

“And hast thou no word—no parting admonition for me, O my father?”

“None, save this:—Strive ever after the highest; content thyself with nothing below perfection; be humble in thine own eyes; and more than all, keep thy heart and hand from evil: sin clouds the soul’s aspirations; and the highest life is a life of perfect holiness. With thy noble intellect and ardent mind, keep an unspotted heart!—and so fare thee well, my son.”

Thus Michael Meyer the Rosicrucian parted from Basil Wolgemuth.

IV.—MORTAL AND IMMORTAL.

PASSIONATELY wringing his hands, or pressing them upon his hot brow, knelt the student alone in his chamber. He muttered wild tones. He had yearned

after the tree of knowledge; he had penetrated within its shadow, and it had darkened his soul, yet he had not tasted of its delicious fruit for which he so longed.

“It is vain—it is vain!” cried Basil; “I strive, but I cannot attain. I have cast all human bliss to the winds; I have poisoned my youth—and thine, too, Isilda, joy of my life!—and all in vain. No immortal gifts are mine—I would fain pierce into Nature’s depths, but she hides her face from me. O my master! thou didst tell me of the world of spirits which would surely be revealed unto me. I look up into the air, but no sylphs breathe soft zephyrs upon my hot cheek; I wander by the streams, but no sweet eyes, looking out from the depths of the fountains, meet my own; I am poor, but the gnomes of the earth answer not my bidding with treasures of silver and gold. And thou, O Fire, glorious element! art thou indeed peopled with these wonderful beings; or are they deaf to my voice, and invisible to my eyes alone, of all my brethren?”

And lo! as the student spoke, a bright pyramid of flame darted upwards, and a voice, like that of the Fire when it answers the soft breathing of the winds, replied—

“I hear thee—what wouldst thou with me?”

A paleness came over the young man’s cheek, and he drew back involuntarily.”

“Dost thou then fear me, O mortal!” said the voice again, sadly. “Look again.”

Suddenly the pyramidal flame was cloven asunder,

and there appeared in its centre a form, smaller than that of humanity, but perfect in feminine loveliness. Wavy wreaths of golden flame fell around her, like a woman's beautiful hair, and about her semi-transparent form twined an amber vesture, resembling in hue and airy substance the Fire from which she sprung. Her hands were folded submissively on her breast, and her eyes were fixed earnestly on the young student's face as she again repeated—

“Dost thou fear me now?”

“How should I fear thee, beautiful vision?” cried Basil in ecstasy; “and what am I, that thou shouldst deign to visit me thus?”

“Thinkest thou that this is the first time I have visited thee?” said the Form. “I have been with thee, unseen, from thy childhood. When, in thy boyish days, thou wouldst sit gazing on the beautiful element which I rule, and from which I proceed, it was I who made it assume in thy fancy strange and lovely shapes. It was my voice thou heardest in the musical breathing of the flames, until thou didst love the beautiful Fire; and it became to thee the source of inspiration. All this was my doing.”

“And now at last I behold thee, glorious creature!” exclaimed the student with rapture. “How shall I thank thee for thus watching over me invisibly, and at last revealing thyself to me!”

“We do but the will of our Creator,” answered the Salamandrine. “I and my kindred are His offspring, even as man; but our being differs from thine; superior

and yet how inferior! We tend thee, we influence thee, we guide thee—in this doing alike His command who made us, and our own pleasure; for our natures are purer and better than thine.”

“I feel it,” said Basil. “I cannot look upon thy all-perfect loveliness without knowing that such a form must be the visible reflection of a soul equally pure and beautiful.”

“A *soul*!” sighed the Fire-spirit; “alas! this blessing is not ours. We see generation after generation of men perish from the face of earth; we watch them from their cradles into their graves, and still we are the same, our beauty unfaded, our power unchanged. Yet we know there must come a time when the elements from which we draw our being must vanish away, and then we perish with them, for we have no immortal souls: for us there is no after-life!”

As the Salamandrine ceased, the vapours of the Fire encircled her as with a mist, and a wailing came from the red caverns of flame, as of spirits in grief, the burden of which was ever—

“Alas for us!—we have no after-life.”

“Is it even so?” said the student. “Then are ye unhappy in the midst of your divine existence.”

The mist which veiled the Salamandrine floated aside, and she stood once more revealed in her super-human beauty.

“Not unhappy,” she answered, with a radiant and celestial smile—“not unhappy, since we are the servants of our beneficent Creator; we perform his will,

and in that consists our happiness. We suffer no pain, no care; doing no sin, we have no sorrow; our life is a life of love to each other and to man, whose ministers we are. Are we not then happy?"

"It may be so," said Basil thoughtfully. "Ye are the creatures of Him who never made aught but good;" and he bowed his head in deep meditation, while there arose from the mystic fire an ethereal chorus; melodiously it pealed upon the opened ears of the enraptured student.

The spirits sang of praise; of the universal hymn which nature lifts up to the Origin of all good; of the perfect harmony of all His works, from the mighty planets that roll through illimitable space, down to the fresh green moss that springs up at the foot of the wayfaring child; of the world of spirits—those essences which people the earth and float in the air like motes in the sunbeam, invisible, but yet powerful; how the good spirits strive with the fallen ones for dominion over man, and how the struggle must continue until evil is permitted to be overcome of good, and the earth becomes all holy, worthy to be the habitation of glorified beings.

"Happy art thou, O man!" they sang. "Even in thy infirmity, what is like unto thee? An earthly life is thine, half the sorrow of which thou mayst remove by patience and love; an earthly death is thine, which is the entrance to immortality. It is ours to guide thee to that gate of heaven which we ourselves may never enter."

And all the spirits sang in a strain that died away as the fire sunk smouldering down—"Blessed art thou, O man!—strong in thy weakness, happy in thy sufferings. Thrice blessed art thou!"

The student was roused from his trance by a light footstep. A hand was laid on his shoulder, and a soft woman's voice whispered—

"Art thou then here all alone, and in darkness, my Basil?"

"All was light with me—the darkness came with thee," answered the student, harshly, like one roused from delicious slumbers by an unwelcome hand;—and yet the hand was none other than Isilda's.

"Once thou used to call me thy light of life, Basil," murmured the girl. "I would not come to anger thee."

It was too dark to discern faces; but as Isilda turned to depart, Basil thought she was weeping, and his heart melted. What would he not have given, at the moment, for the days of old—the feelings of old, when he would have drawn her to his bosom, and soothed her there with the assurances of never-ending love. But now he dared not; the link between him and earth was broken. He thought of the immortal gift just acquired, and he would not renounce its ecstatic joys—no, not even for Isilda. He took her hand kindly, but coldly, saying—

"Forgive me; I have been studying—dreaming; I did not mean to say thou wert unwelcome."

"Bless thee for that, my Basil, my beloved!" cried the girl, weeping, as she pressed his hand passionately

to her heart and her lips. "Thou couldst not be unkind to me—to thy betrothed wife."

Basil turned away; he could not tell her that the tie was now only a name; and Isilda went on—

"Thou hast not looked the same of late; thou art too anxious; or thou hast some hidden sorrow upon thee. Tell it to me, my Basil," she continued, caressingly. "Who should share and lighten it but I, who love thee so?"

"Dost thou indeed love me so well, Isilda?"

"Thou art my all—my life—my soul! It were death itself to part from thee," cried the girl, in a burst of impassioned feeling, as she knelt beside the bending form of her lover, and strove to wind her arms around his neck. She hardly dared to do so now to him who had once wooed that fondness with so many prayers.

"Woe is me, alas!" muttered the student. "Must thou also be sacrificed, Isilda!"

She did not hear his words, but she felt him unclasp her arms from his neck; and Isilda sank insensible at Basil's feet.

The die was cast. Slowly the student laid her down—her, the once beloved—on the cold floor. He called "Margareta!" and before his sister entered, went out into the open air.

V.—THE TWO HEARTS UNVEILED.

BASIL WOLGEMUTH had now gained the summit of his wishes. He had panted for the river of knowledge—had found it, and allayed his burning thirst in its waters, which were to him a Lethe, bringing oblivion of all else. He walked as one in a dream, or like the false prophet of old, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open. He was gentle to his sister, and to the patient, sorrowful Isilda; but he shrank from their society, as he did from that of every living soul. He would disappear for days together, wandering in the woods and mountains, far from his home. There the student was alone, with his newly-acquired sense—there he penetrated into the marvels of the invisible world. He saw the Sylphs of the air floating over him, and fanning his slumbers with their ambrosial wings. The beautiful Undines spread their cool, wavy arms around him, and through the riven earth he beheld the Gnomes and Cobolds at work in their treasure-caves. Borne by the Salamandrines, he viewed the caves of the volcanoes; their lurid recesses were exposed to his gaze, and he saw the central fires smouldering beneath the surface of the globe—the cradles of the earthquake.

Then when the student returned, he would shut himself up in his chamber, and invoke the being who had first appeared to him—the Salamandrine. He imbibed from her lips wisdom beyond that of man;

he sunned himself in the light of her glorious beauty, and became insensible to all earthly things.

“O my master,” Basil would often murmur, “thou wert right. What count I now the cup of mortal pleasure while that of heaven is at my lips? I could torture—almost destroy this poor frail body, for the sake of my soul.”

And while the student revelled in these ecstasies, his slight form grew more shadowy—his dreamy eyes became of a more fathomless depth, and his whole appearance was that of a spirit which had for a season assumed this mortal coil. No thought of Isilda, no yearning for her forsaken love crossed his memory; the lesser feeling was all absorbed in the greater, for the one reigning passion of Basil Wolgemuth’s soul was a thirst after knowledge.

And Isilda—the devoted one—how fared it with her? She knew that no other maiden had stolen her lover’s heart, and yet it was changed towards her. She saw it to be so. Some overpowering passion had extinguished that of love; and her life’s hope was gone. She did not pine nor weep; she felt no anger towards Basil, for in her eyes he could do no wrong. Isilda had worshipped him from her girlhood, with a love mixed with idolatry, for it long seemed like “the desire of the moth for the star.” None other had ever won a thought from the maiden, though many had wooed her; but having once loved him, none else could have filled her heart for ever. Even Basil, when he came to measure her love by his own, dreamed not

of its intensity. So absorbing was this one passionate love, that even the sad change in him who was its object, could not weaken it. She desired no more but to be near her betrothed; to see him; to hover round him as silently as his shadow—only to have the blessed privilege of loving him, and the memory, sweet though mournful, that he had once loved her.

VI.—LOVE UNTO DEATH.

BASIL WOLGEMUTH lay asleep on his couch. He had outwatched midnight, and was very weary. The follower of Rosencreutz, the philosopher, the man of genius, had not passed the limits of mortality; his earth-vesture clung around him still. Fatigue had overtaken him in the midst of his vigils—he had thrown himself down on the hard pallet, and fallen asleep, as sound as if the rude couch of the Rosicrucian were the monarch's bed of down. The morning stars looked in at his casement, and the dim light of a single lamp fell on the countenance of the student. He lay calm as a little child, with folded hands, as if his mother had lulled him to sleep with songs. Oh! if that mother could have beheld him now, how would she have wept over the child of so many prayers!

I have said before that there was little beauty in Basil's face, at least that mere beauty of form, which is so dazzling—and it is good that it should be

so, for a lovely face seems fresh from the impress of God's hand; we naturally love it, cling to it, and worship it as such. But Basil's sole charm had been the genius so plainly visible in his face, and a sunny, youthful, happy look, which made it pleasant to behold. Now, all this was long gone. But while he slept, a little of his olden self returned; a smile wandered over his lips, and his sunny hair fell carelessly, as in the days when Isilda's fingers used to part it, and kiss his white, beautiful forehead. Suddenly a red glare lighted up the still shadows of the chamber—it flashed on the eyes of the sleeper.

“Art thou here, O spirit?” murmured Basil, half roused, and dazzled by the brilliant light, which seemed a continuation of his dream.

But it was no celestial presence that shone into the student's room. He awoke fully, rose up, and looked out into the night. The city lay hushed beneath the starlight, like a palace of the dead; it seemed as though no mortal turmoil would ever more ruffle its serene repose. But far down the dark street, in a direction where Basil's eyes had in former times been fondly turned waiting for the one solitary lamp which was to him like a star—lurid flames and white smoke burst forth, and contended with the gloom around. There was in the city the fearful presence of fire, and the burning house was Isilda's.

With a sudden impulse, Basil leaped at once through the low window, and fled rather than ran to the scene. This time human love had the pre-

eminence; he forgot all but Isilda—Isilda perishing in the flames!

Wildly raged the fierce element, as if kindled by a hundred demons, who fanned it with their fiery breath, and leaped, and howled, and shouted, as it spread on with mad swiftness. Now it writhed in serpent-coils—now it darted upwards in forked tongues, and now it made itself a veil of dusky vapours, and beneath that shade went on in its devastating way. Its glare put out the dim stars overhead, and hung on the skirts of the clouds that were driven past, until the sky itself seemed in flames. House after house caught the blaze, and cries of despair, mingled with shrieks of frantic terror, rose up through the horrible stillness of night. The beautiful element which Basil had so loved—the cheering, inspiring Fire—was turned into a fearful scourge.

The student reached the spot, and looked wildly up to the window he had so often watched. A passing gust blew the flames aside, and he distinguished there a white figure—it was Isilda. Her hands were crossed on her bosom, and her head was bowed meekly, as if she knew there was no hope and was content to die.

Basil saw, and in a moment he had rushed into the burning dwelling. He gained the room, and with a wild cry of joy, Isilda sprung into his arms. Without a word, he bore her, insensible as she was, through the smoke and flame, to a spot where the fire had not reached. Further he could not go, for his strength

failed him. He laid his burden down, and leaned against the wall.

"I might not live for thee, Isilda," cried the student, "but I can die for thee. Yet, is there no help—no hope? Where are the spirits that were once subject unto me? And thou my guardian—spirit of Fire!—is this thy work? Where art thou?"

"I am here!" answered a voice; and the Salamandrine appeared. The flames drew nearer, and Basil saw myriads of ærial shapes flitting among them in mazy wreaths. They came nigh—they hovered over his mortal love—their robes of seeming flame swept her form.

"Touch her not!" shrieked the student, as he bent over Isilda, his human fear overpowering him.

"The good and pure like her, are ever safe," replied the Salamandrine. "We harm her not." And she breathed over the maiden, who awoke.

"Oh, my Basil!" murmured the girl, "is death then past? Thou didst come to save me—thou lovest me—thou art mine again!" and she stretched out to him her loving arms; but Basil turned away.

"Hush!" he said, "dost thou not see them—the spirits?"

Isilda looked round fearfully. "I see nothing—only thee."

The student's eyes flashed with insanity. "See!" he cried, "they fill the air, they gather round us, they come between thee and me. Now—now their forms grow fainter—they are vanishing—it is thou,

woman! who art driving them from my sight for ever. Stay, glorious beings, stay! I give up all—even her.”

“Nothing shall part me from thee!” shrieked the girl, as she clung to her lover, and wound her arms round him. “No power in heaven or earth shall tear us asunder—thou art mine, Basil—let me live for thee—die for thee.”

“Thou shalt have thy desire!” the student cried, as he struggled in her frantic clasp.

There was the gleam of steel—one faint, bubbling sigh—the arms relaxed their hold, and Basil was alone—with the dead!

The Fire stayed in its dire path, and a wailing sound rose up as the spirits fled away. Heaven and earth had alike forsaken the murderer.

He knelt beside his victim; he wept, he laughed, he screamed; for madness was in his brain.

“I may clasp thee now, Isilda,” he shouted, “thou art all mine own!” and he strained the cold, still form to his breast, kissing the lips and cheeks with passionate vehemence.

“I will make thee a pyre—a noble funereal pyre,” he continued; “I will purify this mortal clay, and thou shalt become a spirit, Isilda—a beautiful, immortal spirit.”

He bore the dead to where the fire raged fiercest; he laid his beloved on a couch; composed the frigid limbs, folded the hands, and kissing the cold lips once more, retired to a distance, while the flames played round the

still beautiful form that was once Isilda. Lovingly they enwreathed and enshrouded it, until at last they concealed it from the student's gaze. He turned and fled. The Fire hid in its mysterious bosom the ashes of that noble and devoted heart. Isilda had found the death she once thought so blest—death by the hand of the beloved.

VII.—THE HOPE DECEIVED.

FEARFULLY did morning dawn on the eyes of the murderer. He had regained his chamber unobserved, and there he crouched in its most gloomy nook. His frenzy had passed away, and left the freezing coldness of despair. The darkness was terrible to him, and yet when the light of morning came he shrank from it in horror, and buried his face in his garments to shut out the fearful glare. All day he remained motionless. Margareta's loud weeping came to him from within. From her brother's bolted door, she thought he had departed on one of his usual rambles, and Basil heard his name repeated often, mingled with Isilda's—whom all supposed to have perished in the flames.

Basil heard his sister's sobs; but they fell idly on his stony ears. Many sounds rose up from the street—the widow's cry, the orphan's moan, and the despairing lament of the houseless and homeless—but all were nothing to him. He kept the same immoveable

attitude until daylight waned, and then he rose up, and lit the Fire on his hearth.

Brighter and brighter grew the blaze, and wilder gleamed the eyes of the student. He swayed his body to and fro with a low murmuring, and then he passionately invoked the Salamandrine.

“The sacrifice is complete—I have no bond to earth—my desire is free. Why delayest thou, O spirit? Come, teach me; let me know the past. Give me wisdom—I thirst!—I thirst! Let me become as a god in knowledge!”

But the vision came not—there was no voice.

“Spirit of Fire! art thou deaf to me still? I have done all—I have broken every human tie—I have become what men would loathe. Hear me—answer me, or I die!”

Wreaths of dusky vapour overshadowed the Fire, and from them proceeded a melancholy voice:—

“O mortal, sin has entered thine heart; blood is on thy hand, and the polluted can have no fellowship with the pure. Thine eyes may behold us no more for ever!”

A fearful shudder passed through the student's frame.

“It is false! Cursed spirits, ye have deceived me!”

“It is not we who have deceived thee, but thine own soul,” answered the Salamandrine. “We are not evil; unseen, we would have watched over thee thy whole life through. It was thou who didst long after what is permitted but to few—to hold commune with the invisible. To do this with safety, man must keep a heart

pure as fearless, and such was not thine. Thou didst seek us—we allured not thee. Blame not us, therefore, but thy own weakness. Thou hast sinned, and henceforth we are invisible to thee!”

“Woe! woe!” cried Basil, in agony; “have I then lost all? Adorable spirit, guide of my life, have mercy!—forsake me not!”

“I do not forsake thee, O poor mortal!” answered the voice, sadly. “I am here, beautiful and tender as before; but thou art no longer able to behold me. Sin has darkened thine eyes, and thou wilt see me no more—for ever.”

“No more?” echoed the student in tones of thrilling misery.

“No more,” replied the mournful accents of the Salamandrine; and a faint chorus, like the sighing of the wind, echoed plaintively—

“No more, O poor mortal, no more!”

The vapour swept away from the Fire, and the student was left to his despair.

XI.—THE END OF ALL.

Two days after the terrible Fire, some who loved and pitied the desolate Margareta, forcibly entered her brother's room. They found Basil dead. He lay on the floor, his marble face upturned to their horror-stricken view. There might have been agony in his last moments, for the hands were tightly pressed upon

the heart ; but all was calmness now. The features had settled into their eternal repose. How or when the spirit parted, none knew, save Him who gave it, and who had now reclaimed His gift. The book of Michael Meyer lay beside the student ; and firmly clasped in the stiffened fingers, was a long tress of woman's hair. More than this, all was mystery.

Many years after, when the memory of the student of Cologne had long been forgotten, an aged nun died in a convent, not far from the city. It was Margareta, the only sister of Basil Wolgemuth, the Rosicrucian.

ANTONIO MELIDORI.

A Passage from the History of the Greek Revolution.

I.

OF all the islands and shores of the Mediterranean—the regions where gods and heroes once trod—whence sprang the lovely and poetical myths of Greek theogony—where the world's childhood grew into fresh, powerful, glowing youth—there is no spot where the spirit of ancient Greece lingers as in the island of Candia. The woody valleys of Crete, where Jove was nursed of old, are changed only in name. The mountain Psiloriti, with the olive-groves at its feet, the oak-woods down its sloping sides, is yet the same Ida where the Corybantes are fabled to have lulled the babe-Thunderer to sleep with their songs. And even the very people seem unchanged. The mountaineers of Candia are in appearance as noble as the warriors whom Idomeneus led from the same hills to the siege of Troy. The young Sphakiotes have universally the classic Greek head,

with its low, broad brow, its curved lips, and exquisitely-modelled chin; such as Phidias has made immortal. They have the same free step and bearing; and their primitive mountain life, while it has caused them to retain the Greek form, has kept alive in them much of the ancient Greek spirit. The Sphakiotes are bold, determined, and generous-hearted; they despise luxury; and a certain natural chivalry shows them to be worthy descendants of the men of old who made their land the queen of nations.

It was at the time when Greece began to move, giant-like, in her slumbers, and the Turkish yoke was already about to fall like green withes before her strong hands. The old spirit was awaking throughout the land; the names of Ipsilanti and Marco Bozzaris were whispered far and wide, and men began to look at one another—Turks and Greeks—with threatening and suspicious eyes. As yet, the dawning of this new power had not been visible in Candia. The Sphakiotes lived at peace in their mountains. The olives were gathered, the vines were pressed, and the sound of the distant war came more like a murmur heard in dreams than a waking reality. Now and then a few of the youngest and most daring of the Sphakiotes might be seen talking earnestly together, and anxiously seeking for news from the main-land, where the strife was going on. But the flames of Tripolizza and Corinth did not reach to the peaceful shores of Candia.

Near the top of Mount Psiloriti a young girl stood laden with a basket of olives. She carried it on her

head, and the attitude gave to her figure all the free and unrestrained grace of ancient sculpture. Her face, too, was purely Greek, modelled after the form which approaches nearest to our conceptions of ideal beauty. The Sphakiote girl might have stood for one of the olive-bearing priestesses in the processions of Ceres. As she waited, her eyes rested on the summit of the hill, following the motions of a young mountaineer who came leaping down. It was the old tale, as old as the time of Helen of Troy. Foolish, shy maiden, who would not move a step to hasten that so-longed-for meeting, but stood there with her beaming eyes, her brightened cheek, waiting for her lover !

“ Antonio ! Antonio ! ” she murmured, long before he could hear her ; and her stature dilated, and a look of pride mingled with her gladness, as she watched him descend the mountain-side, as active and graceful as a young deer.

The admiration of personal beauty seems inherent in the Greek nature. In ancient times it was a positive worship ; and the most perfect in form of both youths and maidens had crowns and honours bestowed on them, even as the poets and warriors. In other lands this feeling might be degraded into materialism or sensuality, but with the imaginative Greeks it was the worship of the ideal—the image of a dim and undistinct divinity, which to their minds could only be shadowed forth and embodied in the most perfect human loveliness. They united the two ideas of the good and the beautiful, believing one could not exist without

the other. And even now this old worship lingers in the land, which has truly been described by the poet as a body whence the spirit is departed. There are no people more beautiful, or more susceptible in their perceptions of external beauty, than the modern Greeks.

Thus while the young Sphakiotte watched her lover, her heart thrilled with pride that the noblest of the mountain youths was her own.

“Philota! dear Philota!” sounded the pleasant voice of Antonio; and he stood beside her. A classic eye, to see them, would have thought of Paris and Enone on the Trojan mountain which bore the same name as this Cretan hill—“Many-fountained Ida.”

“I have waited for thee long, Antonio,” murmured the girl.

“Forgive me, Philota. I lay dreaming on the hill-top, and forgot thee—no, not forgot; that I could never do; but my thoughts were busy. Come, let me take the olive-basket, and we will go to the place which made my thoughts wander.”

A sigh, so faint as to be almost inaudible, moved Philota’s lips. Alas! he thought of many things—she of him only. It was the difference that always is, between man’s love and woman’s.

They ascended the mountain, and stood on its summit hand in hand. The whole island was before them, like a picture; it lay at their feet sleeping in loveliness.

“How beautiful—how calm it is!” whispered Philota. “Oh, Antonio, if we could live for ever in this peaceful happiness, thou and I!”

A restless movement in her lover made the girl look in his face: it was clouded. "The holy saints forbid!" he muttered between his teeth. She did not hear him; it was well she did not, for the words would have pierced her heart like a thorn. And yet he loved her better than all things on earth, except ambition.

"Thou dost not enjoy this scene as I do, Antonio. Something has troubled thee to-day. Tell me what it is?"

Antonio turned away before those soft, loving eyes: there was something in his heart which he could not lay open at once to their gaze. "How keenly thou readest my face, Philota!" He laughed, or tried to laugh.

"Then there is something?"

"I had not meant to tell thee; but I must. My dearest, it is not worth that anxious look of thine. It is only that I have been to-day on the mountain with Rouso and Anagnosti, and they told me that the war is coming nearer—even to our shores."

"Antonio! and thine eyes brighten—thy frame dilates with joy, whilst I—I only shudder."

"Ah, there will be no more idle staying at home!" the young man continued, as if he had not heard her. "No more gathering honey, treading olives, keeping goats, while one's arm is strong—strong to fight. Look, Philota, far down in the bay there is a flash; they are already trying the guns with which our new governor has armed the harbour. Listen! the noble

governor, Affendouli, is already forming troops in the mountains, and Rouso and Anagnosti have joined them. Rouso will be made Captain of Sphakia. Dost hear, Philota?"

She stood, no longer sustained by his entwining arm, which, in the energy of his declamation, Antonio had removed: her head was bent, her eyes fixed on the sea; there was in them a mournful meaning, but he saw it not. Without waiting for her answer, the young Sphakiot continued; "Rouso was so proud with his new arms—the poor mean boy whom I taught to use a gun!—yet how he sneered at mine with its rusty lock! And he is to be captain of a band, and will become a hero, whilst I——"

Philota turned slowly round, and her pale face met her lover's, which was flushed with anger and excitement. "Dost thou wish to go too? Antonio, was this what thou hadst to tell me?"

He had all along been preparing himself to reveal to her this his desire, yet when she guessed it of her own accord, and his scarcely-formed thoughts were uttered plainly by her, he could not answer a word, but played confusedly with the silver chain of his belt.

"Antonio, I have seen thou hast not been happy of late. There is more in thy heart than I can satisfy. I am only a poor weak girl, and thou a noble man, full of great thoughts and aspirings. Hush! do not say nay. It was ever so. Thy love is all to me; but thou needest something beyond mine. What is it?"

He looked at her in surprise; for her voice, though sad, was calm, and there was no anger in its tone. "Philota, I love thee—none but thee. I swear it! This fool Rousso has taunted me: he said I chose to live idly in the mountains when all our Sphakiotes were going to fight against the Turks. I would have proved him a liar—I would have joined the governor at once—but for——"

"But for Philota: is it not so? I love thee; but my love should be a garland of flowers to adorn thee, not an iron chain to fetter thee," said the girl, using the metaphorical language of her clime. "Antonio, thou shalt go."

There was a deep silence between them. At last the young man broke it. "Hast thou thought of all that must follow this, Philota? Thou wouldst be left alone, and there could be no bridal feast after the olive harvest. Antonio Melidori is not so mean as to wed a bride and leave her. Philota, thou art nobler than I; I will not go."

Philota threw her arms about his neck. The heroism of a Greek maiden lay deep in her soul; but it was yet sleeping. She was still a girl—a timid girl. She wept tears of joy when her lover said his mind had changed, and he would not go to the wars.

"It would have killed me to part with thee, Antonio, even though I told thee to go. Ay, and I would never have prayed thee otherwise had it been against thy will. But war is so terrible a thing. Thou seest only its glory; I think of its miseries. I fancy

thee pursued, wounded—slain; and then I would die too.”

“Foolish girl,” whispered the lover, whilst his fingers played tenderly with the shower of black hair that lay on his shoulder; “thou forgettest all the honour that would have been thine when I came back a general. Think how our maidens envy the fortune of the wife of Ipsilanti—how glorious is the destiny of the wives of the heroes in the Morea.”

“I have heard of only one, who saw husband and son slain; and then fought in their room—the lady Bobolina. Had I been she I would rather have lain down and died with them.”

Melidori's eyes were fixed on the bay. “There it flashes again: it is a signal to gather the troops. Anagnosti said so. Why must I stay behind like a coward?”

He muttered these words indistinctly; but they fell on the girl's ear like a funeral knell. She saw the chafing of the proud and ambitious spirit; she knew that she held no longer the first place in Antonio's heart—that a stronger power than love had sprung up there, and ruled triumphant. The knowledge broke her girlish dream for ever.

Philota looked at her lover as he stood, almost unconscious of her presence; his fingers clenched tightly on the silver-mounted pistol, which every Greek carries in his belt; his beautiful lips compressed, until their rosy curves became almost white. His thoughts were far away from her; and Philota saw it. One

moment her hand was pressed on her heart; her lips opened, as if to give vent to the terrible cry of anguish that wrung her soul; but it came not. The struggle passed, and her resolution was taken.

“Antonio!” She laid her hand on his arm, and he started as if it had been the touch of death instead of her soft warm fingers. “Antonio, I too have changed my mind. Thou shalt not stay at home, but go and fight for Greece with the rest, and come back covered with the glory thou desirest so much!”

The young Sphakiote’s countenance became radiant with joy. “Thou sayest this from thy heart, Philota?”

“I do.”

“And thou art happy—quite happy?”

“Yes; if it makes thee so.”

True woman’s heart! Self-denying heroism of love, your strength is more than the strength of armies!

II.

A FEW days more, and Philota was alone. There was no hand to aid her in her daily journey up the mountain, or to relieve her of the olive-basket which she carried to the honey-gatherers. Antonio Melidori was gone to the wars. In that stirring time, when every day the sound of battle grew nearer, and every heart learned to beat with the fierce excitement of war,

Philota alone was calm: no enthusiasm brightened her cheek when she saw her lover depart—the noblest of the band of young Sphakiotes which he led with him to the governor Affendouli. Even the cry of patriotism was to her an empty sound. Her imagination was never dazzled by that watchword, which is too often only another name for ambition.

It was strange that at such a crisis, and in such a land, this one Greek maiden should have thought thus. But in her childhood she had been brought up by her mother's brother, a priest in the Greek church—that church which so long held fast the peaceful doctrines and pure worship of the primitive Christians. Then it was that Philota learned to look upon war as odious; and as her clear and earnest mind matured into womanhood, all the tinsel of fame fell off from the idol, and left it in its own naked hideousness. The fair image of glory which blinded the eyes of Antonio, was to Philota nothing but a loathsome skeleton.

Month after month the girl followed her lowly occupation on Mount Psiloriti, while her lover fought under the banners of Affendouli. Tidings reached her of his bravery, and his high favour with the general. "I am a captain now," Antonio sent word; "higher than Rousso." When she heard it, Philota smiled; but it was a faint, sad smile, for she feared the stain of a gnawing ambition was already creeping over him. "Antonio—my Antonio!" she wept in secret—"I can love thee, I can pray for thee; why is it that I alone dare not glory in thee now?"

Before the autumn waned, Melidori came home. Again Philota and he walked together along the woody slopes of Ida; but there was a change. Antonio talked now not of her or of his love, but of conflicts which he had sustained, of honours he had won—won through the midst of horrors of which the relation made the gentle girl shudder. He looked at them as merely common things, laughed gaily at her cowardice, and said how brave a soldier's wife ought to be. Alas! even that dear name brought no bright smile to Philota's lips; and as she leaned against her lover, the steel-covered breast of the soldier of fortune seemed cold and repulsive compared to the shepherd's garment of old. Philota felt it was an omen.

They came to the place whence the whole island could be seen. "Look, Philota; there lies my band in that little dell; do not you see their flags flying above the trees? There is one banner that I bore myself—how torn and blood-stained it is! Oh, that was a glorious victory of ours!"

Philota sighed heavily.

"What! art thou not glad? I thought thou wouldst be so proud of my fortune—even of me;" and a shade of vexation darkened the young soldier's cheek.

The girl looked up in his face. "I am proud of Antonio Melidori; more than of the captain of Affendouli."

"Well, well—as thou wilt.—Women are so fanciful," added he to himself.

“I see thou carest little for my honours, Philota,” he continued. “Perhaps thou wouldst rather I had remained a poor drivelling peasant on the mountains? I thought all girls took pride in their lovers’ glory; but it seems not so with thee.”

“Nay—nay: dost thou remember the day when there was an olive-feast?—when, one after the other, our young men arose and sang songs that the impulse of the moment produced? Thou, too, didst pour out thy heart in a chant so glorious, so beautiful—it was of the old times which are dimly remembered in our traditions—that old men wept, and young men’s eyes flashed, and a shout of applause greeted thee that echoed to the mountain-top. Did I not glory in thee then, my Antonio?”

“It was a poor triumph; a puling song, fit for girls only,” answered Melidori scornfully. “Deeds, noble deeds, alone can make the man.”

“Well then, dost thou remember that stormy night when the old Armenian ascended the mountain, and there was no one to follow him in the darkness and fearful tempest—no one but thee; how thou didst save him, and bring him back to the village, and wouldst not take one piastre from the rich man’s proffered gold? Who was so proud of thee then as thine own Philota?”

“But all others said I was mad; and if I had perished on the mountain, where would have been my glory? Who would have remembered the name of the poor shepherd-boy?”

“God!” said Philota solemnly. “The glory of this one deed is worth all thy warlike renown.”

He looked at her, and saw how her stature dilated, and her countenance shone with a brightness almost saint-like. He understood her not, and yet was he struck mute by her earnestness. There was in that meek woman—she was no longer a girl now—who had lived all her life on the mountains, a nobleness of soul that silenced even the bold chief, whose name was regarded as a tower of strength by his soldiers, and honoured by the general himself.

“Come, we will talk no more of this, dear Philota,” said Melidori gently, almost humbly. “Let us descend the mountain.”

The following day Antonio departed; for the Turks had attacked Sphakia, and the war had entered the island itself. The next tidings that reached Philota were, that her lover had been wounded, though slightly. He had been left in a cottage on the outskirts of the town, his band having fled; single-handed he cut his way through the Turks, and escaped with a trifling wound.

“The cowards!” he wrote to Philota, “that there should be cowards even in my band: that they should leave their leader to be slaughtered in cold blood! It was one man’s doing; I suspect who; but I will be revenged one day. Yes, when I have conquered, and the enemy is driven from Candia, then I will be revenged.”

Philota sank, crushed to the earth with pain. Re-

venge, not love, was then the goal of his hopes now ! Moreover, she guessed better than Antonio the insidious tongue which had whispered revolt to Melidori's troop. It was Rousso's : Rousso, who had tempted him to the war—Rousso, over whom he had risen in command—Rousso, who had wooed, and been scorned by Antonio's betrothed. The quick-sighted girl at once comprehended the whole, and she trembled for her lover.

The history of the Greek revolution in Candia records the glory of Antonio Melidori ; how he became a mountain chieftain, whose deeds emulated the fame of the ancient warriors of Greece ; how mothers prayed that their children might be like him ; how maidens delighted to praise his beauty of person, his many acts of generosity, his unequalled bravery ; how there was not a child in the island who was not taught to lisp the name of Melidori.

And all this while, far among the mountains, to whose fastnesses many of the Sphakiotes were compelled to retreat, throbbed the poor heart to whom this burst of glory had only brought desolation—the only heart that truly loved the young chieftain whose fame was on all lips. There, alone, almost forgotten, yet never forgetting, lived Philota.

III.

It is not our purpose to chronicle the outward career of Antonio Melidori as history records it, and as the world beheld it. The world is growing wiser now, and is no longer haunted by the phantom of military glory, a monster at which its own creator shudders. Yet if there could be a cause for which men might justly fight, it was surely that of Grecian liberty. In Candia, the Sphakiotes were battling not so much for renown, as for the preservation of their lives and freedom. Men fought for their own homes, and by their very hearths; and what began in the ambition of a few, was now a struggle of life and death with all. Wise men have said that war must be, that from the foundation of the world liberty has only been bought with blood; yet it is indeed terrible. The world has passed through its childhood of innocence, when kings were shepherds, and rulers held the plough; its youth of strife, when men fought not through meditated revenge, but in haste of blood; its middle age of stratagem, cunning, and ambitious warfare, when thousands were sacrificed to the caprice of one. Soon will come its peaceful and majestic age, when wisdom shall be the only true strength, and men shall rule not by animal force, but by the might of all-powerful mind. May that glorious time hasten fast—fast!

Gradually—so gradually, that Antonio scarcely felt it—the ties became loosened between him and Philota. The commander, the patriot, had no room in his heart for love. Whenever a brief space of repose enabled the lovers to meet, his thoughts were all of advancement, honours, successful conflicts: there was no talk of the bridal feast that was to come after the olive-harvest; and when some of the maiden's early companions jested with her, and others envied her the glorious destiny that would await Melidori's bride as soon as the war was over, Philota only smiled mournfully, for she knew that day would never come.

At last the war grew so near, that many of the mountaineers took refuge in the town of Sphakia. There, day by day, Philota could see her betrothed sallying forth with his band. What a gulf there was between the successful chieftain and the humble peasant girl who plied her needle for bread, watching over him from a distance, with unknown and unacknowledged love! Not one of Antonio's friends would have dreamed that these two had once plighted their vows to each other in the quiet woods of Ida. Yet still he gathered honours every day, and amidst all the warfare he seemed to bear a charmed life. Who knows but that it was because the shield of woman's prayers was ever over him?—the orisons of one whose love had grown so dim, so shadowy, so hopeless, that its only utterance had become a prayer—nay, even less a prayer than a mournful dirge.

At the close of a night-skirmish with the Turks, the cry was raised that the captain Melidori was missing. The band re-entered Sphakia in lamentation. Roussou was at their head, and his countenance had an expression of evil triumph. The women, who soon gathered in the streets, eyed him with dislike and indignation; for Antonio, with his manly beauty and generous spirit, was their idol.

"Melidori is slain—the noble Antonio is slain! It is an evil day for us," they lamented aloud.

"He is not slain; he has deserted to the enemy. I saw him steal off from the field with mine own eyes," said a voice: it was that of Roussou. "Twice during the skirmish I watched him creep among the Turkish outposts. Melidori has deserted."

"Melidori is here!" cried a deep sonorous voice, which caused the soldiers to give a universal shout; and Antonio appeared. He held aloft in his arms a little Turkish child.

"Soldiers! he who says I deserted deserves to be hanged on the nearest tree. I lingered behind to save this poor innocent, whose mother I saw murdered in her tent."

"It is true, then, Sphakiotes, how well your captain loves the Turks, since you see he risks a battle to save one of their children," sneered some one in the crowd. The voice seemed feigned, and in the darkness of the early morning its owner was unrecognized.

Melidori drew up his lofty stature proudly. "Sphakiotes, it is a lie! which could come only from the

wretch who murdered this babe's mother—the cowardly woman-slayer. I scorn to answer it.”

The easily-moved crowd broke out into acclamations, the women especially. When they ceased, Antonio said, “A soldier is scarcely a fit guardian for infancy. Is there none among the wives, mothers, or kind-hearted maidens of Sphakia who will take this poor babe?”

“Spear the puling brat of an infidel!” cried the same malicious voice from the midst. “How dares the captain ask any Sphakiote woman to nurse a viper until its fangs are grown?”

Melidori's countenance glowed with rage; the more so, as, governed by the insidious voice, all the crowd seemed to shrink away, eyeing the young soldier and his burden with distrust.

“Many a Greek babe has fallen under the scimitar of a Turk;” “The child of murderers should not live!” were mutterings that reached the ear of Antonio. The obstinacy and pride of his temper were roused, and even more than his natural generosity, they urged him to withstand the popular cry.

“Sphakiotes, I defy you all! This young Turk shall not perish. I will rear it as my own. If I fall, it shall be brought up as a Greek, and taught to avenge me, as none of these coward brethren of mine would do. Now, women of Sphakia, is there none among you who will take charge of the adopted child of Antonio Melidori?”

"I will!" answered a low voice, and a woman stepped forth from the crowd.

The young commander gave the child into her extended arms. As he looked in her face, he started.

"Philota—thou here?" he whispered hurriedly. "I thought thou wert still in the mountains?"

"There was no longer safety there."

"Why didst thou not tell me? How livest thou? This peasant's dress"—

"Is most fitted for me. I live by the labour of my hands. Was it meet that a poor peasant girl should claim as her betrothed the commander of Sphakia?"

"Philota—generous Philota! But these people must not hear thee. Take the babe. I will meet thee; stay—let it be at dusk, under the city wall."

Oh thou faithful woman! was it come to this?

Philota hushed the wailing babe on her bosom, and said aloud in a calm distinct voice, "Noble Captain Melidori, I am a Sphakiote maiden; I have no husband, nor ever shall have; therefore I will devote myself to this babe, and bring it up as the adopted of the greatest of our Greek heroes. People of Sphakia, you are all witnesses of this vow."

The crowd of women closed round her as Philota departed with her charge. When she was gone, a deep sigh of relief burst from Melidori. Roussos came up to him, and said gaily, "Thou art lucky, Antonio, in finding so ready a nurse for thy young adopted." Melidori's cheek reddened. "Some old damsel who wants a plaything, I suppose?"

"He has not seen her, thank Heaven—he has not seen her," muttered Antonio. "Very likely," he answered aloud. "Well, we soldiers have our whims. I will make this young Turk fight against his own people yet. Come, Rousso, the general awaits us."

At dusk, Melidori wrapped himself in the cloak of one of his men, and went to the place of meeting. Philota was already there.

"This is kind—like thyself, my dearest," he said, pressing her in his arms; but the embrace and the words seemed more from duty than feeling. Philota suffered both in silence, and then she drew herself away, and stood beside him.

"What hast thou to say to me, Antonio?" she uttered, not harshly, but in a tone of calmness that went to the heart of him whose warm love had yet not quite departed.

"Why art thou so cold; am I not thy betrothed, Philota?"

"Dost thou wish me to call thee so now? I thought that dream was over, and by thy desire."

"I never said so."

"No; but it was in thy heart. All is changed with us; we can never be again as in those happy days on Mount Psiloriti. Thou art a great man; thou canst not wed a poor maiden like me. I do not ask it. My love only burdens thee; therefore we will speak of it no more. Antonio, I would give my life for thee; shall I not, then, gladly relinquish this hope for thy glory's sake? I know thou didst

love me once. I shall see thy fame, and I shall be content."

Melidori listened to her first in astonishment, then in shame. "Philota," he said hoarsely, "I am not worthy to kiss thy feet, and yet I dare not say nay to thy words. I am more wretched than thou; forgive me."

It might have been that a lingering hope had fluttered in the girl's heart, but as Antonio spoke, it was stilled for ever. She leaned against the wall, pale, breathless, speechless.

The young soldier went on: "Thou dost not know what a life I lead—how full of danger and anxious thought: it would be death to thee to share it."

The vain excuse unsealed Philota's lips. "Not so; be not deceived, Antonio. It is not for myself that I speak. God and my own heart know what I would have been to thee; how I would have shared thy fortune; have followed thee, if it must be, through seas of blood; have strengthened thee; have suffered no woman's tear to unnerve thy arm; have striven to make myself worthy to mount step by step with thee, that in thy coming glory no man might say Antonio Melidori blushed for his wife. This is what might have been: it is too late. Let us part while thou yet lovest me a little."

"And thou—and thou——"

"I will live at peace in my humility, knowing that love for no other maiden stole thine from me. Be content; I feel thou hast never been thus faithless."

"No, no, no!" groaned the young soldier, burying his face in his hands. "Thou judgest me kindly—and justly. I never loved woman save thee; I never shall."

"Then do not grieve," said the girl, as she bent over him in holy pity, and took his burning hands in hers. "I forgive thee; thou hast done me no wrong. I will rear this child: it will love me; and I can call it by thy name, and teach it how noble was that act of thine which saved it from death. Believe me, I shall be very happy, my Antonio." Loving was the falsehood that came from those trembling lips—a falsehood more holy than truth.

"Be it so, Philota," said Melidori. "I am too unworthy even to bless thee; but thou wilt be blest."

"And thou too, I pray the Virgin! And now that we are friends—only friends—but tried and true ones, I must tell thee what tidings I have heard. Rousso is thine enemy; how made such is partly known to thee, wholly so to me. Rememberest thou how, when he and his band pillaged an old man's house, thou didst compel him to restore the spoil? From that time he has vowed thy death. It was his feigned voice that goaded the people against thee this morning. And afterwards, when threading my way through the town, I heard two men whispering thy name, and one said, 'His tomb is open.' Now, Antonio, beware. I am too lowly to be heeded; I will watch: it may be that the dove can warn the eagle from the snare."

"And thine own safety—thy life?"

"Is thine, and spent for thee. It is best so. And

now hearken—thy name is shouted below. We must part here.” She gave him her hand.

“We had not used to part thus, Philota. Let me feel that I *have been* thy betrothed: let me kiss thee once more—it is the last time.”

Philota fell upon his neck, and their lips met. It was less the kiss of love than of death; the last token between those who sever for eternity. Then she drew herself from those beloved arms, and fled.

IV.

THE career of Melidori seemed a succession of triumphs. Every scheme contrived by the designing malice of Rousso failed. It was as though a good angel ever watched over Antonio. Affendouli, the Cretan governor, whose dearest friend and counsellor the young Sphakiote was, told him so. Melidori answered in a tone half bitter, half solemn, “I know it: I believe it!” He spoke the truth.

No one but Affendouli knew how deep was the cause of suspicion which made Antonio shrink from his former companion Rousso, until a coldness very like positive enmity grew up between them. The governor himself saw through various manœuvres which Rousso had practised to turn his own favour from Melidori, and dispossess the latter of the command: but at last there seemed to come a change, and Rousso, after a long absence, sent to Sphakia a

message of peace, declaring the resolution of both himself and his brother-in-law Anagnosti to end all petty feuds, and serve under Melidori. Affendouli gladly accepted this overture, for he saw the evil that private animosities did to the one great cause. Rousso had invited Melidori to a solemn feast of unity, in which they might end all differences, and Affendouli urged him to go.

“We must have peace among ourselves. All private feelings should be sacrificed to public good. Thou wilt go, Melidori?” entreated the old man; and Antonio consented.

Richly mounted, and attended by a few of his own band, the Sphakiote commander set out to the place where Rousso and his handful of followers had bivouacked. Ere the cavalcade was out of sight of Sphakia, a peasant-woman came to the young captain’s abode, and asked to see him.

“There is the dust-cloud his horses leave behind,” was the answer. “Go after him; it is only three leagues: you mountaineers are swift-footed. You will reach him by the time he has done feasting with Captain Rousso.”

The woman clasped her hands above her head with a terrible cry, and fell to the ground.

All the lavishness and revelry of a soldier’s banquet signalized the feast of Rousso and Anagnosti; wine flowed in streams, and riotous music and laughter went up from the tents towards the still stars overhead.

Melidori gave himself up to the enjoyment of the moment in perfect faith.

“A gay life is a soldier’s!” Anagnosti cried. “Melidori, this is better than the olden olive-feasts on Mount Psiloriti.”

A shadow came over the young captain’s face—Rousso noticed it.

“Perhaps Antonio regrets having left that quiet, easy life on the mountains for such a one as this?” he said, with a smile that bordered on a sneer. On Rousso’s face it was almost impossible to distinguish between the two.

Melidori was not easily provoked. “No, no,” answered he, gaily; “I would be the last to regret those old times—all very well in their way; but glory—patriotism”—

“Both fine-sounding words; though some who fight, fight for other things more substantial.”

“I do not understand you,” said Melidori, rather coldly.

“Oh, we all know the honours that await our young commander when the war is over: plenty of spoil—riches—a bride, for Affendouli’s daughter is fair, and her father generous. But, perchance, there is some trifling impediment to that. A long time ago, on the mountains, people talked of a little damsel named Philota.”

“Rousso,” said Antonio, hurriedly, “this Cyprus wine is delicious. I pledge thee.”

“With all my heart! And, as I was saying, there was to have been a wedding with the olive-feast.”

“Ha—ha—ha!” laughed Melidori. “Thy thoughts run on fair damsels and wedding-feasts instead of warfare. Let us talk of something more soldier-like.”

“Presently; when I have drunk to thy health and that of Affendouli’s daughter.”

“Not united with mine,” said Antonio, gravely. “I honour, but love not the lady, and do not choose jesting.”

“Then there is some truth in the tale about the little Sphakiotte girl after all? Antonio, may be thou art a happy man; for I saw the other day, near thy house, a pretty face, that put me strongly in mind of one I knew on Psiloriti. Is it so?”

Melidori’s lips quivered with passion, but he restrained himself. “Rousso,” he whispered, hoarsely, “speak as thou wilt in private—not here.”

“What! conscience-stricken? Is Philota——”

“Utter that name again with thy cowardly tongue, and——”

Rousso rose up from the table, and drew his short dagger. “Wilt thou fight? Then so will I.” In a moment Melidori saw through the intent of all the torturing words which had come from that wily tongue. His anger cooled at once; he resolved to thwart the purpose of his enemy.

“None shall say that Antonio Melidori came to a friendly banquet, and there fought with his host,” he answered calmly. “Soldiers, and you my fellow-guests, bear witness that for this reason, and this only, I will not fight. What would our enemies say of this

petty brawling over cups? It is unworthy of Greeks. I will end it."

So saying, Antonio gave the signal of departure to his suite, and prepared to mount his horse. Anagnosti followed him.

"Noble captain," he said obsequiously, "do not let this feast of unity end in division. Roussou is so hasty; but he repents him now. I pray you return, and let all these differences be reconciled."

Melidori answered courteously and frankly, as was his nature. "There is none who would rejoice in peace more than I; it was for this only that I came hither."

"Then let us seal our peace by a brotherly embrace," said Roussou, coming forward. His eyes flashed; Antonio thought it was with wine; and his step was unsteady. The young Sphakiotte felt an unaccountable repugnance; but he thought of Affendouli, and the earnest entreaties of the good old man that all private enmity might be forgotten for the sake of Greece.

"Be it so," answered Antonio, extending his arms. Roussou did the same. There was a moment of stillness, and the assassin's dagger was plunged into that noble and generous breast.

A cry, the terrible death-cry, burst forth; it was answered by another from without—a woman's; and Philota fell on her knees beside Antonio!

She had followed him, league after league, with a speed and strength almost superhuman; so that, as she

passed desolate houses and solitary travellers, they thought it was a spirit. And now she had come too late.

In the confusion the murderer and his accomplice fled. Antonio's few soldiers carried their dying leader from the tent, and no one opposed them. There, on the roadside, beneath the peaceful stars, the young commander breathed his life away. It was not a sad ending, for his pillow was the breast of the faithful woman whose love had been the joy and brightness of his youth. Clouds had come over that brightness, but death swept them all away. From his few vague words, Philota knew that his thoughts were not of war, nor of the false glory which had dazzled him, but of that old peaceful time when love was all in all. In the wanderings of his brain, the dying soldier fancied himself again on Mount Psiloriti, and murmured of Philota, of the olive-feast, and the bridal.

"We will stay here," he whispered. "I had a dream: it haunts me yet; but it is over. We will never leave our own mountain, Philota; never, never!" His head sunk on her shoulder; the dream of which he spoke—the troubled dream of life—*was* over, for eternity.

The governor Affendouli lamented with the sincerity of a worthy heart over his lost friend. He would have honoured the dead by magnificent obsequies, and with that intent he called together his officers and the chief men of Sphakia; but in the midst of the assembly a woman appeared, and claimed the body of Antonio

Melidori. The governor questioned her right, since he knew that Antonio had no surviving kindred.

“It cannot humble the dead,” the woman murmured; and then said aloud, “Antonio Melidori was my plighted husband: here is the betrothal ring. Give me his body, that I may bury him in the peaceful mountains where he was born. He would not rest with your guns booming over his grave. You possessed him, soul and body, in life; he is now mine only. Give me my husband, and let me go.”

“Poor wretch!” murmured the compassionate governor, as he looked on the wild gestures and frenzied air of the Sphakiote woman. “O Greece, thy liberty is dearly bought!”

On the summit of Mount Ida, on the very spot where the whole island lies stretched below, there is a cross of white stone, with the name—“Antonio Melidori.” The soldier rests where no murmur of battle can ever reach his grave. The island is at peace; there is no warfare now. The mountaineers have their honey-gatherings, their olive-harvests, their vine-feasts; and no one remembers the dark days of old. For a time, many a Sphakiote soldier came to say his prayers beside the white cross, and talk of the young patriot who had died for his country’s sake; but as war-time ceased, this far shrine was forgotten; and now it is rarely visited, except by two, who live together on the mountain-side—a woman of middle age, and a youth, a neophyte in the Greek church. He calls her mother; and she is indeed a mother to him, though not his own.

These two are the only pilgrims who pray by the tomb of the victorious commander whose name once rang through Candia like a trumpet sound. It has died away now, as all such glory dies, and will ever die. Love only can survive the grave.

THE TWO HOMES.

A Story for Wives.

OUR story begins—as most other stories terminate—with a wedding.

Mr. Stratford, the rich banker, gave away at the marriage altar on the same day, his only daughter and his niece. The fortunate bridegroom who won the former was Sir Francis Lester, a baronet of ancient and honourable family. The husband of the latter was of lower standing in society—plain Henry Wolferstan, Esq., a gentleman whose worldly wealth consisted in that often visionary income, a “small independence,” added to an office under Government which yielded a few hundreds per annum. These were the two who carried away in triumph the beautiful heiress and the graceful but portionless niece of Mr. Stratford.

With the usual April tears, the two young brides departed. A carriage-and-four conveyed Sir Francis and Lady Lester to the abode of a noble relative; while the humbler railway whirled Henry and Eunice

Wolferstan to the quiet country house where a new father and sisters awaited the orphan. And thus passed the honeymoon of both cousins, different, and yet the same; for in the lordly domain and in the comfortable dwelling of an English squire, was alike the sunshine of first, young, happy love.

In a few weeks the two couples came home. How sweet the word sounded, "our home!" What a sunny vista of coming years did it open to the view, of joys to be shared together, and cares divided—that seem, when thus lightened, no burden at all. Sir Francis Lester forgot his dignity in his happiness as he lifted his young wife from her downy-cushioned equipage, and led her through a lane of smiling, bowing, white-ribboned domestics, up the noble staircase of his splendid house in — Square. Hand in hand the young pair wandered through the magnificent rooms, in which taste refined the luxuries of wealth. Isabel was never weary of admiring, and her husband only looked in her eyes for his delight and reward. At last, sated with pleasure, Lady Lester threw herself on a sofa. "I can do no more to-day; I am quite wearied."

"Wearied of home—or of me?" said Sir Francis, smiling.

"No, no," answered the bride, looking proudly and fondly at her husband; "only wearied with being so happy."

"I hope you may always have that excuse, dearest. But now we must not give way to laziness: my mother

is coming to-night, you know ; and I want my Isabel to be brilliant and beautiful—more than usual, if possible.”

“ Indeed I do not care : all the mothers in the world would not induce me to rise and have the fatigue of dressing and dining in state to-night.”

Sir Francis looked regretful ; but he had been married too short a time to do more than look. “ As you will, Isabel,” he said ; “ but I wished—— ”

There was something in his tone that made the wife look up. She saw the expression and repented. “ If you wished—nay, I will do anything you wish, now and always,” whispered her beautiful lips in his ear, and the shadow was gone from between the two—swept away by the touch of love.

Half a mile from the abode of Sir Francis Lester was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wolferstan. It was one of those pleasant houses that a generation now past used to erect in the suburbs of London. White staring terraces and formal squares have risen up around, but the old houses still remain here and there, with their barrier of trees, or low privet hedges, shutting out the dusty road ; their little gardens and verandahs covered with ivy, or woodbine, or thick-leaved vines. To one of these pretty dwellings Henry Wolferstan brought home his bride.

It was an evening in September, chilly enough to make a fire welcome, when Henry and Eunice sat for the first time by their own hearth together. The ruddy firelight gleamed on the young wife’s face as she

presided at the tea-table ; while her husband, resting at his ease in an arm-chair, watched with his affectionate eyes every movement of the delicate little hand that flitted about in matronly dignity. How happy they were ! After all the trials of a love whose course had been often ruffled by worldly cares and hindrances, to find themselves at last in a still haven—a happy, wedded home ! Eunice looked round the cheerful room, hung with well-chosen prints, silent, beautiful companions, which they both loved so much ; on either side bookshelves and an open pianoforte—all seemed to speak of future comfort and happiness. And then she saw beside her the face that had been for years the sunshine of her life, and knew that he was her husband ; that they would never be parted more ; that the love between them would be as an ever-living fountain, daily springing up anew to freshen and brighten their united life. All this came upon the full heart of the young wife, and she fairly burst into tears. Happy blessed tears they were, quickly kissed away, and changed into smiles !

Many and many a time in after-years did the young couple call to mind that first evening in their own home—how they looked over their treasures, their household gods ! Eunice tried her new piano, and sang ; but her voice trembled ; so at last they came and sat by the fireside—like John Anderson and his spouse, as Henry laughingly said—and built castles in the air ; the jests always ending in seriousness, for they were too happy to be very mirthful.

Time glides away fast enough with every one, and most of all with those whose life is untroubled. Eunice had been married six months before she began to think how long it was since she had resigned her hand into Henry's loving keeping. Yet short as the time seemed, it was sufficient to make the former life of both appear like a dream. They had already settled down into a calm, sedate married pair. Sometimes people jested with them upon restricted freedom and marriage fetters; but Henry Wolferstan only laughed—he was ever of a merry mood—and asked if any man or woman, single or not, could ever truly say they had their *liberty*. And in good truth it is well it should be so; for such liberty would be a sore burden sometimes.

Mrs. Wolferstan still kept up her intercourse with her cousin, for Isabel was of too generous a disposition to make the difference in position a bar to such old friendship. Still there was externally a distinction between the wife of a rich baronet and of a gentleman of limited income: and, still more than this, there was the difference of habits, thoughts, feelings, which the diverse fortunes of the two cousins naturally brought about; so that, if the intercourse of the two wives gradually narrowed, it was scarcely surprising. Eunice never returned from Lady Lester's house, which breathed the very atmosphere of gaiety and splendour, without feeling a sense of relief on entering the quiet precincts of her own home.

One day she came earlier than usual to visit Isabel,

whom she found still in her apartment, seemingly half-asleep; but when Eunice drew aside the curtains, and let in the warm noon sunshine, she saw the pale face and swollen eyes that were beneath the rich lace cap. Before she had time to speak, Lady Lester observed, "Well, Eunice, my husband and I have had our first quarrel."

"I am sorry—truly sorry. And Sir Francis——"

"Do not mention him: he is unkind, proud, obstinate."

"Hush!" said Eunice, laying her finger on Emily's lips; "you must not speak of him thus—not even to me."

"Nay—I will not be contradicted," answered the young beauty resolutely. And Mrs. Wolferstan thought that to listen would perhaps be the wisest course, though she knew the evil of such confidences in general.

"My husband gives me nothing of his society," continued Isabel. "He is always going out—not with me, but alone, or with that disagreeable mother of his, whom I hate to see in my house; yet she makes it like her own, and I am thought nobody—I, the wife of Sir Francis Lester! I entreated him this morning not to invite her so much, that he and I might be alone together, if he would stay at home a little more. But he was very angry; not passionate, for that he never is—I often wish he were—it would be better than his cold, formal manner when he is displeased."

"Was that all?" asked Eunice.

“Not quite. I told him he ought not to leave me so much—that I would not suffer it. And he answered in his quiet way, ‘It is in Lady Lester’s own power to make her society more pleasant to her husband.’ And so he went away. I will make him repent it, though,” said Isabel, while the hot flush mounted on her brow. Eunice saw at once that it was no time for even gentle reproofs, and besides, her cousin was not all in the wrong; there was much to be laid to the charge of the husband also. Scarcely had Mrs. Wolferstan succeeded in calming her, and just as she was beginning to think how she might best frame salutary but tender advice, the elder Lady Lester entered.

The hasty greeting between the wife and mother of Sir Francis showed mutual dislike. Eunice contrasted the tall, harsh-voiced, frigid lady before her with the gentle woman who was Henry’s mother—and her own, too, in love, which made the formidable title of mother-in-law but a name for a most sweet bond. Thinking of this, how much she pitied Isabel! Had she not heard the confession of her cousin, the one half-hour during which she listened painfully to the abrupt, coldly polite, or sarcastic speeches that passed between the lady and her son’s wife, was enough to convince Eunice that she was in a house of strife. She rose to depart; for it was vain to hope for more conversation with Isabel. As she bade her cousin adieu in the anteroom, Eunice could just find time to whisper, “Isabel, when I married, a wise and true friend said to me, ‘Take

care of the *first* quarrel!’ I did so; Henry and I have not had our first quarrel yet. Dear girl, at all risks, end yours; make any sacrifices to do so; and never, never have another. God bless and help you! and good-bye.”

The wise Solomon says, “The beginning of strife is like the letting out of water.” Alas! if they who first open the fountain did but know into what a fearful river of woe it soon swells, sweeping away everything in its overwhelming tide! Isabel Lester was wise enough to follow her cousin’s advice; she did “make up” the quarrel, as a loving and still beloved wife almost always can, if she chooses. But Sir Francis, though gifted with many high qualities, was a difficult temper to bear with. His character and pursuits were fixed before he married; his wife had to mould her habits to his, for he would never bend his to hers. He loved Isabel fondly, but, probably from the difference in their years, he regarded her more as a plaything than an equal. After the silken fetters of the lover were broken, he would never brook the shadow of control. To give him an idea that he was ruled, was to lose that influence for ever. Isabel had truly called him obstinate; for the same quality that made him firm in a good purpose, hardened him in an erring one. To seek to thwart, was but to strengthen his iron will. Yet he was a man of high principle and generous feeling; but he required to be lured by smiles to a cheerful home, instead of being driven away by frowns and complainings.

Let us pass over another year, and again visit the

two homes. A mother's bliss had come to both: the heir of Sir Francis Lester was received with triumphant joy, and cradled in satin and down; while the first-born of Henry Wolferstan was laid in its mother's bosom with a tearful but not less happy welcome. Life had become very sweet to Henry and Eunice; their cup of joy was running over. Too much bliss is a snare to the wisest; and therefore, perhaps, it was for the best that, before many months had passed over the babe whose advent had given so much happiness, a shadow gathered on the path of the young parents.

Eunice sat waiting for her husband's daily return from town. Sleep had closed the eyes of her little Lily—the child's name was Lavinia, but they called her Lily, and very like was she to that sweet flower, especially now as she lay asleep. Eunice's fingers were busy in fabricating a christening robe for her darling; and the mother's heart kept pace with their quick movements, travelling over future years, until she smiled at herself to think how earnestly she had been considering the making of the bridal dress of the babe of three months old that lay unconsciously sleeping by her side.

A little later than his accustomed hour—for he was generally very punctual—Henry came in. He looked pale, and his eye was troubled, but he kissed his wife with his usual affection, perhaps even more. Still, Eunice saw that all was not right. She waited for him to tell her: he always did; but this night he was silent. A few passing questions Eunice put, but they were answered so shortly, that the wife saw that that

plan would never do ; so she tried to distract his attention by speaking of Lily and the christening.

“ See, Henry, how beautiful she will look in her robe—the darling!” said the mother, unfolding and displaying the delicate fabric.

Henry covered his face. “ Take it away!” he said, in tones of deep pain. “ I cannot think of such things. Eunice, I ought to tell you, and yet I dare not.”

“ What is it you dare not tell me, my own Henry?” said Eunice, softly putting her arm round his neck. “ Nothing wrong, I am sure ; and even if so, you know I will forgive.”

“ I have not done wrong, Eunice ; it might be foolish, but it was not wrong.”

“ What was it, Henry, love?” said a voice so low, that it might have only been that of his own heart urging the confession.

“ I will tell you. You know my brother George, how wild he is, and always was? Well, he came to me a year ago : he had a good situation offered him, but they required a surety ; and he asked me to aid him : I did so for the honour of the family. I was bound for him to the extent of our little all—poor Lily’s fortune—and he has just fled to America—defrauding his master, and me. Eunice, we have now only my salary to live upon. This is the trouble that weighs me down.”

“ Is that all?” said the wife. “ It is nothing—nothing,” and she smiled through her tears.

Her husband looked surprised. “ But do you know

that we shall be much poorer than we are now? that we must give up many comforts? and the poor babe growing up too. Oh, how thoughtless I have been!"

"Never mind the past now, dear Henry; I have only one thing to complain of—that you did not tell me sooner."

"You have indeed a right to complain," said Henry slowly and painfully. "I have sacrificed my wife and child to a brother that deserved nothing. It is all my fault that you are reduced to poverty."

Eunice looked at her husband with eyes overflowing with love. "Henry," she answered, "since you speak thus, I also must think of myself. I must remember that I brought you no fortune; that I owe all to you. When I consider this, what right have I to complain of reduced luxuries—nay, even of want?"

"You are my own noble-minded wife," cried Henry, folding her in his arms. "The richest treasure I ever had was the loving heart you brought me."

Thus even adverse fortune without could only throw a passing shadow on that blessed, united home.

The birth of their son drew a little nearer the hearts of Sir Francis Lester and his wife, but their life had been too long a troubled current to receive more than a temporary calm. When Sir Francis stooped from his usual dignified reserve to fondle his child, with the pride of a new-made father, these caresses, after the first pleasure was over, gave a pang to Isabel's heart. She was absolutely jealous of the babe, attributing her husband's more frequent society to his delight

in his son and heir. She even doubted the increased fondness of manner that he evinced towards herself; until, repulsed by her coldness, he again sought abroad the comfort that was denied him in his splendid but joyless home.

From that home Sir Francis became more and more estranged. His wife rarely saw him in the day, and midnight often found him absent. If she complained, or questioned him whither he was going, or where he had been, his sole answer was silence or haughty reserve. In the early days of their marriage, Isabel had often had her way, even against her husband's will, by tears or caresses. But the former were useless now: the power of the latter she scorned to try. Only the shadow of her olden love lingered in the wife's heart, and in its stead had come distrust, and jealousy, and wounded pride.

One morning daybreak saw Lady Lester returning from a ball alone, for her husband now seldom accompanied her. As she entered, her first inquiry was, if Sir Francis had returned? He had not; and this was only one of many nights that he had outstayed the daylight. Lady Lester compressed her lips in anger, and retired; but she had scarcely gained her room ere Sir Francis entered.

"You are out late?" said the wife. He made no answer. "Where have you been?"

"Nowhere, Isabel, that can signify to you."

"Sir Francis Lester, excuse me," answered Isabel, trying to speak calmly, though she trembled violently,

"I have a right to know where you go and what you do—the right of a wife."

"Do not let us discuss unpleasant topics; I never interfere with your proceedings."

"Because you know there is no evil in them. I have nothing to hide. You have."

"How do you know that?"

"Ah—I see. I was right," cried the wife, startled by his sudden and violent change of manner. "Shall I tell you what I think—what the world thinks? That you gamble!"

"The world lies!" cried Sir Francis, the words hissing through his lips; but he became calm in a moment. "I beg your pardon, Lady Lester; I will bid you good-night."

"Answer me, Francis!" said his wife, much agitated. "Where do you go, and why? Only tell me."

"I will not," replied he. "The ignoble curiosity of a suspicious wife is not worth gratifying. Good-night."

Isabel pressed her throbbing forehead against the cushions of a sofa, and wept long. Ere morning dawned upon her sleepless eyes, she had resolved what to do. "*I will* know," muttered the unhappy wife, as she pondered over the plan on which she had determined. "Come what may, I will know where he goes. He shall find I am equal to him yet."

Two days after, Sir Francis Lester, his wife, and mother, were seated at the well-lighted dinner table. There was no other guest—a rare circumstance, for any visitor was ever welcome, to break the dull tedium

of a family *tête-à-tête*. Alas for those homes in which it is so! Silently and formally sat Lady Lester at the head of her husband's table. How cheerless it was in its cold grandeur! with the servants gliding stealthily about, and the three who owned this solemn state exchanging a few words of freezing civility, and then relapsing into silence. When the servants had retired, Sir Francis uttered a few remarks in his usual tone—perhaps a little kinder than ordinary—to his wife; but she made no effort to reply, and he turned to his mother. They talked a while, and then the elder Lady Lester rose.

Isabel's pale cheek grew a shade whiter as she said, "Before we retire, I have a word to say to my husband."

Sir Francis looked up, and his mother observed sharply, "Perhaps I had better leave you together?"

"As you will," Lady Lester replied with a bitter emphasis—oh, how different from sweet Isabel Stratford of old! "But it might be an unpleasant novelty to Sir Francis to listen to his wife without his mother's presence."

"What is all this?" coldly said the husband.

"Merely, that what you refused to tell me, I have otherwise learned. I know where, and how, you pass the evenings in which your wife is not deemed worthy to share your society. I know also where you spent last night. A noble thing, a very noble thing for Sir Francis Lester to be squandering his own—ay, and his wife's—fortune, in a gaming-house!"

Sir Francis started from the table. "It is false!" he said, while the blue veins rose like knots on his forehead.

"It is true," Isabel answered. "I discovered it."

"May I ask how?"

"By the evidence of one who saw you enter the house.

"And shall I tell you, Francis, how that evidence was gained?" said his mother in the biting tone she well knew how to use. "I now see why Lady Lester gave yesterday and to-day two such long audiences to her father's old servant, and why she needed his assistance so much—to make him a spy upon her husband!"

Sir Francis clenched his hands involuntarily, and looking keenly at his wife, said, in a tone so low and suppressed that it became almost a whisper, "Isabel Lester, is all this true?"

Much as Lady Lester had erred, she was not yet so far advanced in the ways of wrong as to hide that error with a falsehood; she answered steadily, though a deep blush spread itself over her face and neck, "It is quite true!"

Her husband, to Isabel's great surprise, did not answer a syllable. His head was bent, and his features immovable. He offered no justification, uttered no reproaches, and his silence irritated her beyond all bounds. Amidst violent bursts of sobbing, she poured out a torrent of recriminations: all her forced calmness had departed, and she upbraided Sir Francis with the bitterness of an injured wife.

“I have endured too long—I will endure no more,” she cried. “You trust me not, and therefore you cannot love me. I will go to one who does both—my kind, dear father. I will leave you—we must part.”

“We *will* part,” said Sir Francis, in a tone of freezing coldness, that went like an ice-bolt to Isabel’s heart. Her husband rose up, walked slowly and firmly to the door; but when he reached it, he staggered, and felt about for the handle, like one who was blind. In another minute the hall-door closed, and he was gone.

His wife sat as he had left her, but her tears flowed no longer: she was as still and white as a marble statue. The mother-in-law stormed, sneered, reviled; but she might as well have talked to the dead. At last she went away. When the servants entered to remove the dessert, they found their mistress still in her seat, half-leaning on the table, but perfectly insensible.

Eunice Wolferstan was roused from the contemplation of her own reverses to soothe the unfortunate Isabel. For two days, during which her delirium lasted, no news of Sir Francis came to his wife. His supposed guilt became as nothing compared to the fear lest he should take her wild words in earnest, and that they should part. But this fear soon became an agonizing certainty. In a letter to Isabel’s father, Sir Francis declared his intention to return no more to the home his wife occupied; that all her own fortune, and a portion of his, should be settled upon her, but that hence-

forth they must be separated. In vain the poor old father, his natural anger subdued by witnessing the agony of his child, pleaded for her. Sir Francis was resolute. That his wife should have dared to discover what he chose to conceal, was a deep offence in his eyes; but that she should have set a servant to watch him—no power on earth would have made the haughty Sir Francis Lester forgive that!

The desolate wife implored her cousin to try her power to soften his obstinate will; for Sir Francis had ever respected Eunice. She went to him: her words moved him a little, as she could see by the changing of his countenance. He bore more from her than from any one; for a man will sometimes yield to a high-souled, pure-minded woman, when he will not listen for a moment to one of his own sex. Eunice pleaded Isabel's sorrow and repentance; but all failed to move Sir Francis. Then she spoke of the child; and at the mention of his boy, she saw the very lips of Sir Francis quiver.

“You will not take him away from her? Poor Isabel's heart will break to lose both husband and child.”

“Mrs. Wolferstan, I wish to be just to myself—not cruel to her. I shall not take the child from his mother. Though it is hard, very hard, to part with my boy.” And the father's voice trembled, until, erring as she thought him, Eunice felt compassion for the stern, unyielding, yet broken-hearted man.

Sir Francis continued, “When Lady Lester and

myself are separated, I could wish the world to know as little about the fact as possible. Keep it altogether secret—or assign any cause you choose; but let there be no shadow cast on her fair fame—or mine.”

“Isabel need fear none,” answered Eunice. “And you——”

Sir Francis drew up his tall figure proudly—“Nor I neither, Mrs. Wolferstan. To a wife who insults her husband by mean suspicions, no explanations are due. But I owe it to myself to say, and I wish you to know also, that your cousin was deceived; that I never stooped to a vice so detestable as gambling; and that the nights I spent in torture amidst scenes I loathe, were devoted to the attempt to save from ruin a friend whom I had loved as a brother. Now judge me as you will.”

Eunice could only mourn that the little cloud which had arisen between the husband and wife, had so darkened the vision of both. But it was passed now: no peace-making could restore the alienated love.

Once only did Sir Francis and his wife meet: it was on the signing of the deed of settlement. A cold bend of salutation was all that passed between the two who had once loved so fondly. Sir Francis preserved his old reserve and calmness of manner; Isabel strove to maintain equal composure, and the excitement of her mind gave her strength. Sir Francis placed his signature on the fatal parchment, and then her father led Isabel to the table. She gave one wild imploring look

at her husband—but his face seemed passionless as stone: there was no hope. She took the pen, wrote her name—her fingers, her whole frame, collapsed—and, without a sigh or moan, dropped down. But he had already departed.

It was over: Sir Francis went abroad; and the young wife, widowed by her own deed, was left alone. Save for the babe who remained to cling round her neck, and look at her with eyes like those of the husband whom she had lost, Isabel's reason would have left her. The magnificent house was closed; and she took up her abode in the home from which she had been taken, a beautiful and happy bride. Thither the loving care of Eunice followed her still; and she gradually became calmer, and wiser, and better, under the guidance of her cousin.

Eunice's own path was far from smooth. In her first high-hearted fearlessness of poverty, her very ignorance had made her brave. Now she came to experience how bitter are those trifling but gnawing cares which those who have known the comfort of easy circumstances feel so keenly; how wearying is the constant struggle to spin a sovereign into the longest thread of gold-wire possible. The grim ogre, Poverty, whom Eunice had at first repulsed so cheerfully and boldly, took his revenge by all sorts of sly assaults on her peace. But in time she bore them better, and felt them less: and it was a balm to all sorrow to know how much she was loved, ay, and revered too, as a good and virtuous wife, "whose price is above rubies," ought to

be, by her husband. And day by day were their hearts more knitted together. She, in willing obedience, yielding honour where honour was due, and he guiding and protecting her, as the stronger should the weaker, in a union in which neither ought to strive for the pre-eminence, unless it be the pre-eminence of love.

For two years only was Eunice fated to know the soreness of altered fortunes. Conscience overtook the brother whose crime had caused so much misery: he died, and, dying, made restitution to the master whom he had defrauded. The master was a just man, and dealt equally well with Henry Wolferstan. His income restored, he left the small house where Eunice had learned the hard lesson of poverty, and returned to the same pleasant home where he had brought his bride.

There, after four years had passed over her head, let us look at Eunice, now in the summer of womanhood, wifehood, motherhood. It was high summer, too, on the earth; and through the French windows of the room where Eunice sat, came the perfume of roses from the garden. Bees hummed among the leaves of the mulberry-tree, luring sweet Lily from her A B C to her favourite seat under its boughs. The child looked wistfully towards her little cousin, Sidney Lester, who was sporting among the flowers, and all her mother's words failed to attract her attention, until the lesson was happily broken in upon by a visitor. Lily scampered away—the unannounced guest entered

—and Eunice looked upon the face of Sir Francis Lester!

She had never seen him since the day of the signing of the deed of separation; and time, travel—it might be suffering also—had changed him much. He looked now like a man whose prime was past; his hair was turning gray, and he had lost much of his stately carriage. When he spoke, too, there was a new softness in his voice; perhaps it was because of the emotion which Eunice evinced at seeing him so unexpectedly.

He said, he had come on urgent business to England; he should soon return to Italy, and had been unwilling to go without seeing Mrs. Wolferstan. After a while he asked after his boy—and then after his wife; but very formally, and as he spoke he walked away to the window. It was to meet a sight which startled him. He hastily turned to depart.

“Excuse me—I understood—I heard—that Lady Lester was in the country?”

“She and Sidney returned to-day, but I feared to tell you they were here,” answered Eunice softly.

“Is that my boy? I must see him;” and the father’s eyes eagerly returned to where Sidney stood on the garden seat, supporting himself by one rosy arm thrown round his mother’s neck, as he pulled the mulberry-leaves within his reach. Isabel sat still—not the brilliant Isabel of yore, but calm, thoughtful, subdued: even the light of a mother’s love could not altogether remove the soft sadness from her face. How little she

knew whose eyes were gazing upon her now ! “ I must speak to my little Sidney,” at last said Sir Francis in changed and broken accents. “ Will you bring him to me ? ”

“ They are coming now,” Eunice answered.

“ Then I will retire to the other room : I cannot, I will not see *her*.” And Sir Francis, with his freezing manner of old, walked away just before his wife entered with her child.

“ Sidney, come with me to the library,” said Eunice, stooping over the boy to hide her agitation ; “ some one wants to see you.”

“ Who is it ? ” asked Lady Lester.

“ An old acquaintance ; that is, a stranger,” hurriedly said Mrs. Wolferstan, so new in the art of stratagem, that her cousin at once guessed the fact. She trembled violently, and sat down ; but when Eunice took Sidney’s hand to lead him away, the mother interposed.

“ Not so, Eunice ; you cannot deceive me,” she said firmly. “ I see it all ; and no one but myself shall take Sidney to his father.” She lifted the boy in her arms, suffered Eunice to open the door, went in, and closed it after her.

For a whole half-hour, which seemed a day in length, did Eunice sit without, waiting for the result of that interview on which joy or misery, life or death, seemed to hang. She heard no sound ; all was still. She hardly dared to hope ; she could not even think ; only her affectionate heart lifted up a wordless aspiration, too indistinct to be even a prayer.

At last the child's voice within called loudly and fearfully, "Aunt Eunie—Aunt Eunie; come!" Eunice went trembling. Isabel had fainted; but she lay in her husband's arms; her face rested on his shoulder, and heavy tears were falling on that poor pale cheek from the stern eyes of Sir Francis Lester.

They were reconciled! Love had triumphed over pride, wrath, obstinacy; and the husband and wife were again reunited, with an affection even passing that of bride and bridegroom, for it had been tried in the furnace of suffering, and had come out the pure gold of patient, long-enduring love.

In the home to which Sir Francis once more brought his loving and now worthily-beloved wife there was no more coldness, no dull weariness, no estrangement. Perhaps it was a fortunate thing for the married pair that the mother of Sir Francis—who had doubtless originated most of his faults of character, by being to him, and his wife afterwards, little or nothing of a mother except the name—now slept beneath a marble monument, as frigid, and stately, and hollow as she herself in life had been.

Perfect bliss is never known in this world; yet if there can be a heaven upon earth, it is that of a happy home, where love—not girlhood's romantic folly, but strong, deep, all-hallowing, household love—is the light that pervades everything within it. With this blessed sunshine resting upon them both, let us take our last look at the Two Homes.

MINOR TRIALS.

A Story of Every-day Life.

THE prick of a pin is often more painful than the gash of a lancet. So, as we pass through life, our minor trials are frequently harder to bear than our great afflictions. The latter either deaden our sense of suffering by the violence of the blow, or else excite an unwonted and unnatural strength, which enables us to stand firm against them. But the former annoy us—irritate us: we chafe against them, and can neither patiently endure, nor manfully fight them. And thus it is that we often see those whom we had most revered for having nobly borne great trials, the first to sink ignobly under lesser ones.

But enough of this moralizing strain. There is no sermon so good as example, and a simple story often does more service than all the essays on morality that ever came from old Wisdom's pen. So here is one.

It was on a fine May morning, that a bride was brought home to the small village of Woodmanslea. It was a gay procession; green boughs were nodding

over the horses' heads, and girls were strewing flowers on the road; for the bridegroom was no less a personage than the young rector, the Rev. Owen Thornton, who had brought to his English home a Scottish wife. Katharine was that rare sight—a truly beautiful woman. Not to a common taste, which generally prefers mere prettiness. Her tall stature, purple-black hair, and aquiline, rather strongly marked features, her eyes—

“ Her dark and intricate eyes,
Orb within orb, deeper than sleep or death ”—

made her beauty more noble than loveable; so that the village girls who clustered around her carriage were in some degree awed, until the inexpressible sweetness of her smile chased away all their shyness. The bridegroom was, as is nearly always the case, totally unlike his wife; mild in face and manner, with irregular but pleasing features, which, amidst all their amiability of expression, bore a certain character of indecision. Quiet and gentlemanlike in his deportment, of disposition according with his kindly looks, not particularly clever, but possessing considerable acuteness of perception, united with almost womanly tenderness of feeling—Owen Thornton was really an excellent man, and no unworthy type of that very harmless and often useful member of society, an English country clergyman.

The carriage wound slowly up the wooded hill, on the top of which stood the church and the rectory. The road through which they passed was bounded by thick hedges, out of which sprang noble trees—oak, elm, and

chestnut with its fragrant white flowers. At times a break in these verdant boundaries showed glimpses of a lovely, wide extended landscape. But when they had passed the old church, and came to the summit of the hill, how beautiful was the scene before them! For miles and miles, as far as the eye could reach, lay a rich undulating valley; sunny slopes, of the graceful curve which is peculiar to the part of the country we describe; white mansions glimmering through trees; dark woods here and there; and the river winding amidst all, like a silver thread, now seen, now lost, until it hid itself in the distant hills that bounded the whole; and above all hung the deep blue arch of heaven, resplendent with the glorious sunshine of May.

Katharine Thornton looked on this scene, and her beautiful lip trembled. She took her husband's hand, and said in a sweet voice, which a slight northern intonation only made more musical, "And is this your sunny England? It is beautiful, most beautiful."

"And you will love it for my sake?" answered the delighted bridegroom.

Her answer was audible to him alone; but the evident pleasure of the young bride had gratified all; and as the carriage turned to enter the heavy gates of the old rectory, the villagers and tenants rent the air with their shouts. And such was Katharine Thornton's welcome home.

A few weeks passed by, and the bride became settled in her new abode, and entered cheerfully on her new duties. It was in every way a great change for Katharine.

rine. True, she had no distant home to cling to and regret, for she was an orphan; and then she loved her husband so entirely! But yet everything she met seemed new and strange to the young Highland girl, thus suddenly transformed into an English clergyman's wife. Still she was happy—most happy! She moved about her beautiful garden on the slope of the hill, and amused herself with the arrangement of her pretty home, which Owen's care had filled with everything that could please his beloved wife. The housekeeping, too—she felt such delight in her new dignity, when she took the head of her husband's table as the mistress of the establishment. It was a girlish feeling; but she was so young—not out of her teens. And then Katharine had to welcome and visit her new relatives—her husband's mother, and brother, and sisters. Her heart was overflowing with love for them all, for she had no kindred of her own; and even before her marriage, she had looked forward to these new ties with intense pleasure. But when the young wife actually met them, though their greeting was not unkind, she fancied it was cold. It might have been fancy—she tried to hope so—yet it weighed on the young warm heart a little.

Mrs. Thornton was an English gentlewoman of the old school, such as exist in the nooks where the manufacturing whirlpool has not yet swallowed up and mingled the gradations of ancient gentry, yeomen, and farmers. Dignified, reserved, but not forbidding—kind to the poor from nature and from custom—loving her children with a deep but not openly-shown affection,

the sole remaining tie of a long-widowed heart—such was Owen's mother. John Thornton, her eldest son, the squire of the village, was the very opposite of his brother—bold, manly, reckless—the best hunter and best fox-hunter for miles round. Devoted to these sports, he lived unmarried with his mother and sisters at the Hall. Of these three sisters we must now speak, for it was to them that Katharine chiefly looked for society and affection.

Miss Thornton, the eldest, was—an old maid. She might once have been handsome, but her younger sisters never remembered her otherwise but as she now appeared—a gentle and ladylike woman of middle age. There had been some shadow over her youth, Owen told his wife—but no one ever spoke of it now. A broken heart is rare—blessings to old Time, the benevolent healer of all sorrows, for the same! And if some coldness was left in Elizabeth Thornton's heart, which gave a slight tinge to her manners, it was all that now remained of her early sorrows.

Agnes, the second sister, was one of those everyday characters that are constantly met with—neither plain nor pretty, neither disagreeable nor particularly winning; but Florence, the youngest, was a beautiful and accomplished girl, and Owen's darling sister. Of her Katharine had often heard, and had longed to see her; but when they really met, she was disappointed. There was an evident constraint in her sister-in-law's manner towards her. Florence seemed to watch so eagerly every word, every action, of her

brother's wife; and then Owen thought so much of Florence. Every new ornament in the house, or improvement in the garden, was the result of her taste, until the young wife became wearied of hearing "Florence did that," "Florence planned this," "Florence thought so and so." Foolish Katharine! she was absolutely becoming jealous; while Florence, on her part, apparently found it hard—for alas! it is rather hard to sink from being a pet sister to the secondary position of sister-in-law to a favourite brother's beautiful wife.

Now came various trifling vexations, which jarred on the spirit of the young bride, and often contracted her fair brow with a frown, at which she herself was the first to laugh and blush when the trivial cause that brought it thither was past. Katharine had borne nobly the loss of parents, of home, and many other sorrows too heavy for one so young; but now, in the midst of her happiness, innumerable minor things arose to annoy her. She was so anxious that her sisters should love her; and yet it seemed that they always happened to visit the rectory when its young mistress was chafed by some household disaster; and Agnes looked grave, and praised English ways and habits in a tone which made Katharine's Highland blood rush to her brow, while Florence laughed, and Miss Thornton talked of the advantages of patience and the beauty of gentleness of temper. And, in truth, this latter quality was what Katharine sorely wanted. She was a high-spirited woman, of strong deep feelings, but she wanted that meek loving spirit "which endureth all things;"

and she felt too keenly those chance words and looks in which even the best of people will at times indulge, not knowing how very bitterly some of them rankle in the memory of another.

Katharine certainly loved Mrs. Thornton; much more than she did her new sisters. It might be that she saw a likeness to Owen in his mother's face; or that his mother's strong and evident attachment to her son touched the wife's generous heart; so that in Owen their two loves met, without one feeling of jealousy or pain. Still, Katharine's sensitive temper questioned towards herself the reserved and sedate manner of Mrs. Thornton.

"How I would love her if she would let me!" thought the young wife many a time. "But I fear she never will."

There is nothing so chilling, so repulsive to affection, as this doubt concealed in the heart; and Katharine's manner grew colder, and her visits at the Hall less frequent; so that her sisters, whose slight prejudices a little patient forbearance would have melted into warm regard, began to look upon Owen's wife as a stranger who could not share in any of their pursuits or enjoyments.

However, Katharine had her husband still: his love was unchanged. Hers had been gained, not by outward beauty or dazzling talent, but, as the dear old song says, "his gentle manners won her heart;" and those "gentle manners," and that innate goodness of heart, could never alter in Owen Thornton. Some might have said that

the young rector's wife was superior to himself: in some things, perhaps, she was; but the thought never entered Katharine's mind. Had it done so, she would have shrunk away from it in fear and shame; for there is nothing so bitter to a wife's peace as to think meanly of him whom she ought to reverence with her whole soul. If all the world had seen Katharine's superiority to her husband, alas for her on the day when it should be discovered to her own eyes!

The honeymoon was over, but many long, sweet evenings—almost lover-like—did Owen and Katharine spend together in the pretty room which overlooked the sloping hill-side. The husband and wife were still lingering in the shadow of the romance of courtship; and they loved to sit in autumn evenings and watch the brown and changing woods, and talk of the mountains and lakes, and wild, beautiful moors, where Owen had first met and wooed his Highland bride. One night the quick-coming twilight found them still here. Katharine had been talking to her husband of her own young days, long before she knew that such a person as Owen Thornton existed. These childish memories left a vague sadness behind; and when Owen brought her harp, and asked her to sing away all old thoughts, she sat down and poured forth her whole heart in the deep pathos of the "Flowers of the Forest."

When she finished the last line, which seems to die away like the last sigh of nature's summer or of youth's hope—"The flowers o' the forest are a' wede away"—Katharine remained some moments silent. Her hus-

band, too, did not speak. She turned towards him—Owen had fallen fast asleep during her beautiful song!

A sudden chill struck on Katharine's heart. She had felt so much, sung with such fervour, and all was lost upon Owen! Poor Katharine! She did not think how many times her gentle husband had listened to songs which his own different associations made him feel far less than she did, and which he entered into solely from his love for her. She had forgotten, too, that he had ridden five-and-twenty miles that morning to administer baptism to a dying child, and to comfort the last moments of a poor widow. No wonder that he was wearied, and had sunk to sleep even in the midst of his wife's sweet music.

When Owen awoke, an hour after, there was no smile on Katharine's face to greet him, and a slight pout sat on her lips, which gave to their very loveliness that expression of all others the most odious on a woman's face—mingled scorn and sullenness. Katharine's good angel had fled; but it was only for a time. In the silence of night all this rose up against her, and floods of contrite tears washed away all the hardness and unkindness which had entered her heart.

Next morning, Katharine's loving care seemed determined to make amends for the unexplained and unconfessed error into which she had fallen. Owen's chair was placed close to the bright fire, which made the misty autumn morning seem cheerful; his favourite flowers, yet wet from the dew whence Katharine's hand had gathered them, were beside him; the break-

fast which he liked best was provided; and Katharine, fresh and rosy as the morning itself, sat behind the ever-musical urn awaiting her husband.

Owen came in with an open letter in his hand. It was from his mother, asking them to one of her old-fashioned dinner-parties. Owen was all cheerfulness; he was always pleased to go over to the Hall—almost too pleased, his wife thought sometimes.

“My mother complains that they have not seen you so much of late, Katharine love,” said Owen.

She looked rather confused. “It is certainly a good while since I went; but I have so many things to keep me at home; and then the girls seldom come here: it is their fault too.”

“Perhaps so. Well, we must go oftener in future, and go to-morrow in particular; and you must make my mother happy by looking well and singing your best,” said the husband gaily.

Katharine felt anything but willing; but the mention of singing reminded her of her sins against poor Owen the evening before, and she knew atonement was needed. So she assented cheerfully, and they went together to the Hall the day following.

Mrs. Thornton’s was one of those formal entertainments so uninteresting to a stranger, when neighbours meet and discuss the public and private affairs of the country. All this was very dull to Katharine; but she looked across the table to Owen’s happy face as he talked to an old college friend. So she bore bravely with her own prosy neighbour, and strove with all her

heart to take an interest in names, and persons, and places of which she had never heard before. Florence, too, was merry, for she had her betrothed husband at her side; and Elizabeth Thornton's rare smile flitted more than once over her mild features as she talked to one who sat next her—a sweet-looking woman, whose pale golden hair, and delicate, almost transparent, complexion, made her at first sight seem scarcely out of girlhood.

When the dinner was over, and Katharine sat with Florence in a little recess in the drawing-room window, out of hearing of the rest, she could not resist inquiring who was the stranger that had attracted her so much?

“Do you really not know?” said Florence, surprised. “Did my brother never speak of Mary Wynn?”

“No indeed: is that her name?”

“Yes: she was Owen's first love.”

An uneasy sensation made the young wife start, and look fixedly at “Owen's first love;” but then she laughed, and asked Florence to tell her the story.

“I hardly know if I ought,” said the mischief-loving girl. “It happened years ago; Owen was very young; and I do not suppose he long remembered her, though he certainly loved her at the time; but,” added Florence gravely, “I know how much she loved him, and how deeply she suffered; for she was, and is, my dearest friend. However, she may have forgotten him now. She seemed pleased to see you, and speaks cheerfully to Owen. Poor Mary! I hope she has forgotten her ‘first love,’ as he has forgotten her.”

No more was said about Mary Wynn, but Katharine became thoughtful and silent; not that she doubted Owen's strong affection for herself, but no woman ever really likes to hear that her husband once had a "first love." And yet Florence was right: Owen had entirely forgotten his boyish flame. It is seldom that such endure; and perhaps it is well; for the silvery veil of romance and fancy which enshrouds man's first idol, would infallibly, when removed, leave an image far below his ideal standard of perfection. Nevertheless, Katharine, in the happy fulfilment of her own young love, felt much more than perhaps Mary Wynn did herself. Had she known how much deeper and stronger is the love of the man than of the boy, of the woman than of the romantic girl, Katharine would not have so closely watched her husband and Mary Wynn, nor have returned home with such a weight on her heart.

Miss Wynn left the Hall, went home, and was forgotten; but still her visit had left a painful impression on Owen's wife. Katharine thought that much of Florence's distaste to herself—aversion it could hardly be called—arose from her strong love and sympathy for Mary Wynn. Day by day the bond between Katharine Thornton and her sisters-in-law was gradually loosening; and her quick eyes were ever discovering failings, and her mind becoming more alive to unworthy suspicions. Florence's mirth-loving nature was to her full of bitter sarcasm; Elizabeth's gentle gravity, which had interested her so much, appeared

only the hypocrisy of self-important goodness; and Agnes's indolence was insupportable. Katharine fancied they tried to make her husband love her less; and even Owen felt the results of her harsh doubts in her changed manner and anxious looks. Husband and wife loved one another still; but the perfect sunshine of all-hallowing, all-forgiving love was gone; and what trifles, what mere shadows, had blotted it out!

In her unhappiness, Katharine's mind turned regretfully to her old Scottish home, and lingered sinfully on many former joys. At last her over-burdened heart would find vent: she told all the doubts and troubles of her wedded life to an old and dear friend—the wife of her former guardian. In this Katharine was wrong, very wrong. Such trials, even when they amount to real griefs, should be hidden in the depths of the heart; no eye should see them—no ear should hear them. True, of her husband himself—the kind, good, affectionate Owen—Katharine had nought to complain. But of his family, the very knowledge that they were his should have sealed her lips.

However, she erred in ignorance; and out of her error, for once, came less evil than good. Her friend, Mrs. Lindsay, was wise as well as kind; and candid, although gentle, was the reproof given to the young wife.

“You are young, and I am old,” she wrote, “therefore, Katharine, listen to me with patience. You tell me how much you are tried—ask of your own heart, have you been entirely in the right? Is there in you no discontent—no readiness to compare old things with

new—no suspicious quickness in detecting slight failings, that, perchance, would best be passed over with a loving blindness? Child, you came a stranger to your husband's home—your sole resting-place was in his affection; having thus trusted him, you should strive, so far as conscience allows, to love what he loves, think as he thinks, see as he sees. All that are his are yours. When you married, his kindred became *your own*, and you should love them as such; not with jealous comparison, not with eyes eager to detect faults, but with the forbearance that is needful in a family bound together for life. And as for their want of love—if they see that you feel as one of themselves, which, indeed, you are; that, to a certain degree, you ‘forget your own people, and your father's house,’ to enter into their plans and hopes, and sympathies; and, above all, that you are bent on conquering any slight obstacles to mutual affection—if they see all this, they will soon love you as your heart could wish. And, my Katharine, make no fancied sorrows for yourself. You are a beloved and happy wife—thank God each day for that blessing, so rare to many. Look not for perfection—it is not to be found on earth; but forget the past, and go on in your loving, patient, and hopeful way; it will surely lead to happiness at last.”

Mrs. Lindsay's words sank deeply into Katharine Thornton's heart. But ere she had time to guide her conduct by their wise counsel, sickness, that harsh and fearful, yet often kindly monitor, came to her. Thus it

happened: Katharine was a wild and fearless rider, and one sad day her high-mettled horse took fright, nor stopped until its burden was thrown senseless at her husband's own gate. Many days she lingered between life and death, and when reason and consciousness returned, Katharine learned that her constant and unwearied attendants, night and day, had been the grave, cold-hearted Elizabeth, and the mirthful and often thoughtless Florence!

"How little I knew them—how deeply I misjudged them!" thought the repentant Katharine. But still she did not know, and it was well that she did not, that the untiring care of the two sisters had sprung at first more from duty than inclination—that Elizabeth's shy and seldom roused feelings, and Florence's remembrance of old prejudices, had struggled long with their natural kindness of heart. Rare, very rare, in real life, is a character even distantly approaching to perfection—the angel nature after which we all unconsciously seek. Most needful is it to bear and forbear; ever seeking to behold the bright half of the nature of all around us. For there are none of the sons and daughters of man—of man made in the image of God—in whom some trace of the divine image does not linger still.

Katharine arose from her sick bed, having learned much. In many a long hour, when she lay in the silence that was necessarily imposed upon her, her thoughts were very busy. Owen's image rose up before her, not as the adoring, enthusiastic lover, who submitted delightedly to all her fancies, and from whom she ex-

pected unwearied sympathy of thought and feeling, but as he was now, and would be more as they grew older—a helpmate not free from faults, but still most loveable, and worthy of the strongest trust and affection, with whom she was to pass through—not an enchanted valley of bliss, but a world in which there were sorrows to be borne, and cares to be overcome, and joys to be shared together.

Then Katharine would lie watching the lithe figure of her sister as she flitted about the room, until her growing love cast a charm even over Florence's outward attractions; and the invalid thought how very sweet her smile was, and what a pleasant voice she had when she came to the bedside to whisper the few words that were allowed. She gratefully remembered, too, that Florence had left the society of her lover, and deprived herself of many amusements, to share with Elizabeth the care of a sick room. Katharine began to hope that her sister really loved her a little, and would love her more in time.

As Katharine grew stronger, this late 'autumn-spring' of affection in the hearts of the sisters still withered not, but rather gathered strength. No explanations were given or asked. Such are often very ill-judged, and evil in their effect. The new bud of love will not bear much handling. A silent look now and then, an affectionate smile, were all that marked the reconciliation. Katharine suffered no misgivings or seeming obstacles to hinder her on the path in which she had determined to walk.

One evening the invalid lay resting, half-asleep, in her arm-chair. Elizabeth and Florence were with her; and after a long silence, supposing her asleep, they began to talk in low tones. Their voices broke through Katharine's dream; but they could not see her for the twilight, and it was some time before her roused faculties could distinguish what they talked about.

Elizabeth was saying, "How very beautiful Katharine looked to-day; I thought Owen would never gaze enough at her."

"Yes," said Florence; "and I think her illness has improved her much. She does not look half so proud. Do you know, Elizabeth, that once I thought her anything but handsome, and wondered that Owen could have chosen her after beautiful, gentle Mary Wynn."

"Ah, that was because you did not like Katharine. You were hardly just to her," observed the mild Elizabeth.

"Yet I really had no positive dislike to her: but she had such strange ways, and seemed to think herself so different from us."

"Yet mama loved her from the first."

"Yes, and so do I now, and you too, and all of us. But she seems so changed, so gentle and affectionate: I begin to think it possible to love one's brother's wife after all," said the gay Florence, giving way to a cheerful laugh, which she immediately checked, lest it should disturb her sister's slumbers.

But Katharine had heard enough. A deep and abiding pleasure mingled with the slight pain which

Florence's unconscious reminiscences had given her. It is so sweet to be loved, and after a prejudice conquered, that love delayed comes sweeter than ever.

Owen's entrance formed a glad pretext for the termination of Katharine's sleep and Florence's revelations; but the wife kept them closely in her heart.

That night Florence was sent for to return home. Elizabeth, at Katharine's entreaty, remained; but Florence was imperiously demanded by the very patient betrothed, and must depart. So, after a short delay, she was ready, and came to bid adieu to the invalid. It was not for long; but still it was the first time they had been parted since Florence had come, in horror and dismay, to her insensible sister's couch. Katharine rose feebly in her chair, and weeping, threw herself on Florence's bosom.

"Thank you, and bless you, dear girl, for all your care of me," was all she could articulate.

"Nonsense!" cried Florence cheerfully, trying to withstand the unusual moistness in her own eyes. "Do not quite overwhelm me, Katharine; I did nothing but what I ought, and what I liked to do, too."

"And you do love me now, Florence—a little?" whispered Katharine as her sister hung over her.

Florence's warm and kindly nature now entirely predominated. "Yes, indeed I do, with all my heart," she cried with affectionate energy, as she folded both her arms round her brother's wife, and kissed her repeatedly.

"Come, come; all this embracing will be quite too

much for Katharine," said the husband, coming forward with a smile, and carrying away his sister to the door, whither Elizabeth followed her. Owen came and sat by his wife's side, and the invalid rested her head on his shoulder, while they talked with full hearts of her happy recovery.

"Florence is a dear girl, is she not?" said Owen after a pause.

This time no feeling of jealousy crossed the young wife's mind. "Indeed she is," Katharine answered; "and I love her very much."

"I thought you would in time, my Katharine."

She did not immediately answer, and then her voice trembled as she said, "Owen, dear, I have not been good; I have been wrong in many things; I have made too much trouble for myself out of slight vexations."

Owen stopped her. "Now, love, I will have no more confessions! Your husband loves you, and you are all good in his eyes now."

"And always will be, if the determination can make me so. And when we are old married people"—a comical twitch came over Owen's mouth as his wife said this—"when we are old married people, we shall be all the wiser, at least I shall, for remembering these minor trials of our youth."

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